

UDC 94:327(476+470)"1921/1924"

THE ACTIVITIES OF THE RUSSIAN-UKRAINIAN-POLISH COMMISSION ON REPATRIATION IN 1921–1924

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The article considers the work of the Mixed Russian-Ukrainian-Polish commission on repatriation in 1921–1924 and the issues affecting its effectiveness. The commission's performance was highly dependent on the state of Soviet-Polish relations at the time. Soviet Russia and Poland established diplomatic relations, but the bilateral ties remained tense, and these tensions impeded the overall progress of repatriation. It is shown that especially during the Riga peace conference (September 1920 – March 1921), the return of the prisoners of war and other nationals was recognised as an acute problem, and art. VII of the Preliminary peace treaty of 12 October 1920, envisaged the creation of mixed commissions. Immediately, the Polish side asked for the return of the prisoners of war, but the Russian-Ukrainian delegation insisted that it could proceed only if the truce was extended, which the Polish side refused to do. It is emphasised that from the beginning, the Polish side was reluctant to address the most contentious questions via the Russian-Ukrainian-Polish commission on repatriation. Disputes erupted over the exchange of individuals, which the parties had committed to performing as a priority under the additional protocol of understanding of 24 February 1921. The article details the cooperation between the Mixed commission on repatriation and the relevant bodies on improving the material and sanitary conditions of the repatriates, notably, between the branches of the Red Cross Society and the Central directorate for the evacuation of the population of the RSFSR, with a focus on the division of the Mixed commission on repatriation for the western region, which covered the Vitebsk, Gomel and Smolensk provinces of the RSFSR and the BSSR. It is also shown that the Polish delegation of the Mixed commission on repatriation was de facto providing consular services to the Polish nationals in the western regions and the BSSR. It has been established that the initiative to close the process of repatriation of prisoners of war and refugees came from the Soviet side, and responded to the decrease in the numbers willing to repatriate en masse ("in echelon order", i. e. by evacuation trains). On 15 February 1923, the Russian-Ukrainian delegation to the Mixed commission on repatriation announced its return and the suspension of the evacuation trains. The Polish side was offered to take similar action and deal with any future matters concerning repatriation by diplomacy. The Polish government suggested that the mandate of the repatriation commission be extended until 1 February 1924, and those of its divisions (in Kyiv, Kharkiv and Minsk) until 15 January 1924. The final protocol ending the mandate of the Mixed commission on repatriation was not signed until 30 August 1924. The repatriation process and the work of the commission were declared complete on 1 September 1924. The Polish delegation referred all unfinished repatriation cases to the consular department of its diplomatic mission. The following estimates are given for the numbers of repatriates who returned to their home countries during the mass repatriation period in 1921–1925: the Republic of Poland (over 1.5 mln, including 1.1–1.2 thnd returning independently), and the USSR (1.2 mln).

Keywords: repatriation; Russian-Ukrainian-Polish commission on repatriation; Tsentrevak of the RSFSR; prisoners of war; refugees.

Acknowledgements. The study was carried out within the framework of the state programme of scientific research "Society and humanitarian security of the Belarusian state" for 2021–2025.

Образец цитирования:

Боровская ОН. Деятельность российско-украинско-польской комиссии по репатриации в 1921–1924 гг. *Журнал Белорусского государственного университета. Международные отношения.* 2023;1:62–70 (на англ.).

For citation:

Borovskaya ON. The activities of the Russian-Ukrainian-Polish commission on repatriation in 1921–1924. *Journal of the Belarusian State University. International Relations.* 2023;1:62–70.

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ДЕЯТЕЛЬНОСТЬ РОССИЙСКО-УКРАИНСКО-ПОЛЬСКОЙ КОМИССИИ ПО РЕПАТРИАЦИИ В 1921–1924 гг.

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Рассматривается деятельность российско-украинско-польской комиссии по репатриации в 1921–1924 гг., выделяются основные проблемы ее функционирования. Работа комиссии во многом определялась советско-польскими отношениями того времени. Напряженность в установлении дипломатических связей между сторонами отражалась на общем ходе репатриации. Утверждается, что проблема военнопленных и репатриантов приобрела особую актуальность во время Рижской мирной конференции (сентябрь 1920 г. – март 1921 г.). В ст. VII Прелиминарного мирного договора от 12 октября 1920 г. предусматривалось создание смешанных комиссий. Стороны были обязаны заключить соглашение о репатриации. Польская сторона предлагала сразу начать обмен военнопленными, но российско-украинская делегация считала это возможным только при продлении срока перемирия, на что не соглашались польские представители. Подчеркивается, что с самого начала работы российско-украинско-польской комиссии по репатриации выявилось нежелание польской стороны решать спорные вопросы. Разногласия начались при обсуждении персонального обмена, который, в соответствии с дополнительным протоколом к соглашению от 24 февраля 1921 г., должен был производиться в первую очередь. Показан процесс сотрудничества смешанной комиссии по репатриации с органами, занимающимися вопросами улучшения материального и санитарного положения репатриантов: отделениями Общества Красного Креста, Центральным управлением по эвакуации населения РСФСР. Обращается внимание на специфику деятельности отделения смешанной комиссии по репатриации по западной области РСФСР (Витебская, Гомельская и Смоленская губернии) и БССР. Кроме этого, указывается, что филиал комиссии с польской стороны фактически выполнял консульские функции в отношении польских граждан как на территории западной области РСФСР, так и на территории БССР. Установлено, что инициатива по приостановке процесса репатриации военнопленных и беженцев принадлежит советской стороне. Причиной этого стало уменьшение количества людей, желающих выехать эшелонным порядком за границы республик. В итоге 15 февраля 1923 г. было объявлено о возвращении российско-украинской делегации Смешанной комиссии по репатриации и приостановке эшелонной отправки. Аналогичные меры предлагалось предпринять польской стороне, а в будущем решать вопросы о репатриации в дипломатическом порядке. Польское руководство считало необходимым продлить срок деятельности репатриационной комиссии до 1 февраля 1924 г., а в соответствующих отделениях (в Киеве, Харькове, Минске) – до 15 января 1924 г. Подписание заключительного протокола Смешанной комиссии по репатриации произошло только 30 августа 1924 г. В итоге массовая репатриация и деятельность комиссии были признаны оконченными с 1 сентября 1924 г. Все незавершенные репатриационные дела польская делегация передала в консульский отдел своей дипломатической миссии. Приводится количество репатриантов, выехавших массовым порядком в 1921–1925 гг. в Польскую Республику (более 1,5 млн человек, в том числе около 1,1–1,2 тыс. человек, приехавших стихийно) и в СССР (1,2 млн человек).

Ключевые слова: репатриация; российско-украинско-польская комиссия по репатриации; Центрэвак РСФСР; военнопленные; беженцы.

Благодарность. Исследование осуществлялось в рамках государственной программы научных исследований “Общество и гуманитарная безопасность белорусского государства” на 2021–2025 гг.

Introduction

The activities of the Mixed repatriation commission in 1921–1924 have not been researched as a separate subject. Indirectly, its operations have been covered in the studies on the lives of the prisoners of war and refugees during World War I, the activities of the Central directorate for the evacuation of the population of the RSFSR (Tsentravak) [1–3], the Belarusian administration for the evacuation of the population [4]. The Mixed commission on repatriation active between the world wars has received limited attention, apart from several mentions in the historiography [5–9]. Polish, Russian and Belarusian scholars have focused extensively on the numbers of repatriates, while the systems and mechanisms for repatriation have largely been overlooked, including with regard to the Polish prisoners of war held in the camps of Soviet Russia during 1921–1922. The available publications mainly provide statistics on repatriated Poles [10–13]. Notably, the Polish researcher

C. Żołędowski [14] reviews the progress of repatriation from 1918 to 1924, detailing the ethnic and religious composition of the repatriates. A fundamental collection prepared by I. I. Kostyushko covers the regulatory and legal frameworks and documents the numbers of repatriated Polish prisoners of war [15]. A document collection on population exchanges prepared by a team of Polish researchers is also noteworthy in this context [16]. However, the interaction between the central institutions and departments, the local state authorities and the management of the camps for the prisoners of war have received scarce attention in these and other studies.

Regulations, correspondence with the Main department of forced labour, and the lists of repatriated Poles can be found in the National Archives of the Republic of Belarus in fund 39 (Central department for the evacuation of the population of the Western region),

fund 40 (Belarusian administration for the evacuation). The bulk of the documents on the topic are kept in two Russian federal archives: the State Archive of the Russian Federation in fund 393 (Chief department of forced labour), fund 3333 (Central department for population evacuation of the RSFSR (hereinafter – Tsentrevak)), and in the Russian State Archive of Social and Political History in fund 63 (Polish bureau of the Central Committee of the Russian Communist party of the Bolsheviks (RCP(b)) – negotiations and development of the normative framework, the work of the Polish delegation in Moscow, and others).

Warsaw and Moscow were the commission's operational hubs, and a sizable proportion of the repatriates travelled through Belarus. The primary duty of the Belarusian administration for the evacuation of the population, which was a division of the central department, was to provide sanitary and medical care. The Mixed commission on repatriation workers oversaw and coor-

minated this operation. The commission's efforts were largely targeted at evacuating the population of Polish descent, while the majority of those transported (up to 51.7 %) were ethnic Belarusians, Ukrainians, and Russians. Studying the commission's operations will therefore yield insightful information about Belarus' social and economic history as well as its foreign relations. This research paper examines the work of the Mixed commission on repatriation in 1921–1924. Consistent with this goal, its objectives were as follows: to explore the tensions in Soviet-Polish relations during the Riga peace conference (September 1920 – March 1921) affecting the collaboration on building an effective repatriation system, to describe the moments of tension during the operation of the Mixed commission on repatriation in 1921–1924, to explain the reasons for the reduction of mass repatriation of prisoners of war, refugees, hostages and civilian prisoners.

Research methodology

The operations of the Mixed commission on repatriation in 1921–1924 were studied utilising a set of historical methodologies grounded in the principles of historicism, and objectivity. With the historical and systemic method, the structural and functional aspects of the Mixed commission on repatriation work in 1921–1924 were uncovered, and the defining role of the overall state of Soviet-Polish relations was demonstrated. Evacuation train services were suspended as the parties stood close to breaking off diplomatic relations, and many of the terms of the Riga peace trea-

ty remained unfulfilled. Sampling, data grouping and other statistical methods were utilised to estimate the overall number of repatriates, prisoners of war and refugees. The problem-chronological method made it possible to reconstruct the activities of the Mixed commission on repatriation as a sequence of logical steps, from the proposal to establish a repatriation system negotiated within the Commission on the exchange of prisoners, refugees, hostages, and internees at the Riga peace conference to the suspension of mass repatriation by rail.

Results and discussion

The Riga peace conference gave significant consideration to the question of prisoners of war and repatriates. The Committee for the exchange of prisoners, refugees, hostages, and internees, presided over by E. Zalewski and I. L. Lorenz, addressed the subject of prisoners. The Provisional peace treaty and the Armistice agreement were both signed on 12 October 1920, and the joint commissions were envisaged by art. VII of the Riga peace treaty. The parties agreed to come to a separate repatriation arrangement. In the view of the Russian-Ukrainian delegation, this premise could only be fulfilled if the armistice remained effective, but the Polish delegates disagreed. The Polish side offered to begin the exchange of war prisoners immediately. There were protracted disagreements about how to define the term “prisoner of war” when the treaty's text was being written. As a result, it was determined that only the actual combatants in the Polish-Soviet war of 1919–1920 would be included¹.

A member of the Polish delegation L. Wasilewski told the Soviet representatives on 26 October 1920, that the Mixed commission on repatriation must be set up and that exchanges must begin. A. A. Joffe, the head of the Russian-Ukrainian mission at the Riga peace conference, consented to the transfer of severely ill and injured Polish prisoners from Minsk in exchange for the transfer of twice as many Red Army detainees, given their larger number². L. D. Trotsky, the People's commissar for military and naval affairs, believed that it was vital to expedite the exchange of prisoners of war, according to G. V. Chicherin, who informed A. A. Joffe on 27 November 1920. The People's commissar of foreign affairs endorsed the idea of a prisoner exchange, as evidenced by the resolution of E. M. Sklyansky, the deputy chairman of the Revolutionary Military Council of the republic³.

A commission for the return of hostages, detainees, and internees was established in Riga to draft a treaty

¹Russ. State Arch. of Socio-Polit. History (RSASPH). Fund 63. Invent. 1. File 190. Sh. 5.

²Ibid. Sh. 82.

³RSASPH. Fund 5. Invent. 1. File 200. Sh. 25.

on repatriation. It was very active, meeting 11 times between the middle of October and the beginning of November 1920. I. L. Lorenz presented the first draft of the treaty on repatriation on 22 November on behalf of the Russian-Ukrainian delegation. The right of the Polish prisoners of war to select their country of citizenship was brought up at the same time⁴.

On 24 December 1920, I. L. Lorenz transmitted from Riga the final draft of the first 18 provisions of the treaty on repatriation to G. V. Chicherin. A week later, on 31 December he announced a revision to the weekly number of prisoners of war to be exchanged, stating that 4,000 Red Army soldiers would be sent back in return for every 1,500 Polish prisoners of war⁵. A. A. Joffe notified G. V. Chicherin on 17 January 1921, that the treaty on repatriation had been printed but not signed. Because there was still no agreement to extend the armistice, the immediate exchange of prisoners could not begin. The Polish side concurred⁶.

In the meantime, work had begun to prepare the receiving areas for repatriates. The Western front's head of the sanitary unit called a meeting on 29 January 1921, to set the priorities and work out the procedure. A medical examination of each train was planned at an isolation checkpoint, and all confirmed or suspect cases would be sent to medical facilities or evacuated by sanitary trains. It was proposed that all incoming returnees would be placed in quarantine before being sent to bathhouses and stationed at barracks [15, p. 284–285].

The Repatriation agreement was signed on 24 February 1921. The term "prisoner of war" was defined to include combatants, who directly participated in combat operations while serving in the armed forces of one of the parties, non-combatants, or active members of the armed forces of one party captured by the army of the other party, and members of Polish army units and detachments captured by the Russian-Ukrainian armies on other fronts, and disarmed and interned by the Russian and Ukrainian authorities. Under the agreement, the prisoners would be exchanged on the all for all principle. Forcible repatriation was not permitted. The sick, disabled and inmates kept in unfavourable conditions would be given priority. The parties agreed to suspend all ongoing persecutions and halt the execution of any sentences in relation to the persons to be exchanged. Only heated wagons would be used for the carriage of healthy prisoners during the winter months, while the sick and frail would be transported by sanitary trains, where possible. Prisoners with infectious diseases would not be allowed to travel with the healthy prisoners and would be available for return only after they have recovered [15, p. 284].

Before the joint commissions were even established, A. A. Joffe told G. V. Chicherin on 6 March 1921, that the dispatch of transports with Polish army prisoners of war had to start no later than 10 days after the agreement was signed. However, the expected first wave of prisoners of war did not show up at the exchange stations, as promised by the Russian-Ukrainian side⁷.

To complete the repatriation, two mixed Polish-Russian-Ukrainian commissions were established within a month, with offices in Moscow and Warsaw. There were a maximum of 30 individuals in each delegation, which consisted of three members, two of their deputies, and any support personnel that was required. The two joint commissions' duties included facilitating the organisation and progress of the repatriation of prisoners of war. Members of the commission were also granted the authority to visit the locations where prisoners of war were being held, as well as to register and maintain records of prisoners of war (create lists)⁸.

It was decided that the repatriation commissions would get to work as soon as the Riga peace treaty was signed, without having to wait for its ratification. The local authorities concerned were given an urgent directive by the Soviet government to send the Polish prisoners of war. The first return of Polish war prisoners was from the Smolensk camp. It began on 19 March 1921, a day after the peace agreement was signed. The first trains with the prisoners of war from the Orel, Bryansk, and other camps departed westwards on 30 March. By mid-April, the Soviet border station Negoreloe had received the first transports with Soviet war prisoners from Poland⁹.

The exchange of prisoners of war under the terms of the Repatriation agreement began in mid-March 1921. Two entry points were designated. One was on the Moscow – Minsk – Baranovich line, at Negoreloe (Koidanovo) on the Soviet side, and Stolbtsy on the Polish side. The other was at Zdobunovo on the Rovno – Shepetovka – Kyiv line. Standing on the Polish side, Zdobunovo received traffic in both directions¹⁰. Notwithstanding the all for all principle established in the Repatriation agreement, the exchange was not symmetrical. The Soviet government cited difficulties in locating passenger-grade wagons and the scarcity of functional locomotives as reasons for the delays on its part. Large sections of the Soviet railways had been damaged and had not been repaired for a long time. Railway congestion was also a problem. As a result, travel speed was slow, and stops for several days at the hub stations were not infrequent.

In early April, the Soviet government approved the composition of the Russian-Ukrainian delegation to

⁴RSASPH. Fund 5. Invent. 1. File 191. Sh. 95.

⁵Ibid. Sh. 234.

⁶Ibid. Sh. 267.

⁷RSASPH. Fund 63. Invent. 1. File 191. Sh. 431.

⁸Ibid. Fund 17. Invent. 112. File 208. Sh. 2–3.

⁹Ibid. Sh. 56.

¹⁰Natl. Arch. of the Repub. of Belarus (NARB). Fund 39. Invent. 1. File 340. Sh. 17–20.

the Mixed commission on repatriation to work on Polish territory. The Polish side appointed a similar delegation to travel to Moscow (chairperson S. Korsak and members colonel S. Lubenski (deputy chairperson), J. Ermalowicz, K. Skaszynski, V. Skupenski, M. Ragalski, M. Mikulowski). On 11 April the Russian-Ukrainian delegation departed for Warsaw. It was headed by E. N. Ignatov (succeeded by E. Y. Aboltin in November 1921) and consisted of P. I. Burowcew, W. K. Sosnowski, Y. S. Kaluzhny (members), A. A. Bartoshevich (secretary), and S. N. Orekhov (general secretary). At the Soviet border, the Soviet delegation learned that the Polish delegation had not departed from Warsaw for an unknown reason¹¹. For the Soviet delegation, that meant having to wait at the border indefinitely. It could not continue to Warsaw for another two weeks, until it finally arrived on 24 April. The commission's work did not start for another four days. Branch offices for the Polish mission were located in Kharkiv, Petrograd, Minsk, and other cities. The Russian-Ukrainian delegation had offices in Baranovichi and Rovno, where the refugees were being registered¹².

The Polish side's reluctance to settle contentious matters was clear from the outset of the Mixed commission on repatriation work. Disagreements arose over the exchange of individual prisoners, provided by the addendum to the treaty of 24 February 1921. The Soviet side was offered to exchange 300 political prisoners, mostly members of the labour movement held in Polish jails and labour camps, for an equal number of Poles imprisoned in the Soviet republics. A personal exchange in small groups, the makeup of which was decided by the Polish authorities independently, was the only arrangement the Soviet delegation was able to secure from the Polish side after protracted negotiations. As a result, the exchange was delayed for several months. When forming the transports with repatriated Polish citizens, the Polish delegation to Moscow was giving preference to ethnic Poles over Belarusians and Jews. According to the Repatriation agreement, the return of the prisoners was voluntary. They could refuse by signing a written notice, but such refusals were not common¹³.

There had also been several calls to relocate the entry point for the repatriates from Negoreloe to another area (like Koidanovo). However, the commission never had a substantive discussion about the proposal while the permanent border was being established. Trains from the RSFSR arrived at Negoreloe station, where they were turned over to a Polish representative, according to the

Tsentrevak. On 10 August 1922, the Russian-Ukrainian delegation requested to open a third transfer point on the Polotsk – Vileika line to facilitate the journey for the repatriates. In the end, the Polish government rejected this suggestion and requested the creation of more repatriation commission offices in areas where sizable numbers of refugees could be found¹⁴.

By the end of 1921, the bulk of the Polish refugees had returned. The repatriation of optants started concurrently with the refugees' return and continued up until the fall of 1923. By the beginning of August 1921, most Red Army prisoners of war, along with large numbers of hostages and refugees, had also returned from Poland. By May – July, the great majority of Polish war prisoners had returned to their homeland. No more than 7,000 or 8,000 were still waiting to return.

As quoted in a response to the Polish side from the Russian-Ukrainian delegation to the Mixed commission on repatriation, the Polish counterparts had expressed displeasure at the growing numbers of refugees arriving at the crossing points (1,000 people daily at Baranovichi and 500 at Rovno) and had shared concerns about the lack of food and poor sanitary conditions on the trains. In the understanding of the Polish side, only organised travel of the refugees was allowed, and no individual crossings were permitted. However, art. XXVII of the Repatriation agreement sets the minimum number of arrivals at a crossing point at 4,000 weekly. Also, the Polish side could not refuse to accept more arrivals. In its letters of 16 and 17 November 1921, the Polish delegation complained about a large number of returnees delivered by the Russian-Ukrainian side. Indicating that the Polish border facilities were overwhelmed with the workload, the Polish side proposed to limit the number of arrivals to 1,000 weekly at Baranovichi and 500 at Rovno. In turn, the Russian-Ukrainian side complained about long delays in securing border crossing clearances from the Polish side, causing a line of trains to build up. On 18 November the Polish delegation demanded that health and food stations be set up and barracks be constructed at the border¹⁵. Incidentally, a feeding point was already active at Negoreloe at the time, open to Polish and Soviet repatriates¹⁶.

In reality, the Mixed commission on repatriation activity conflicted with the organisations responsible for the physical and sanitary conditions of the repatriates. For example, on 4 July 1921, the head of the Polish delegation S. Korsak wrote a letter to the Minister

¹¹Statement by the press bureau of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Poland on the course of the first meeting of the Mixed Russian-Ukrainian-Polish commission on repatriation affairs // Documents and materials on the history of Soviet-Polish relations. Moscow, 1965. Vol. 4 : April 1921 – May 1926. P. 19–21 (in Russ.).

¹²NARB. Fund 6. Invent. 1. File 192. Sh. 38.

¹³Letter from the chairman of the Polish delegation to the chairman of the Russian-Ukrainian delegation to the peace talks with Poland A. A. Ioffe // Documents on the USSR foreign policy. Moscow, 1959. Vol. 3 : 1 July 1920 – 18 March 1921. P. 658 (in Russ.).

¹⁴NARB. Fund 39. Invent. 1. File 340. Sh. 45–49.

¹⁵Letter from the Russian-Ukrainian delegation to the Mixed commission on repatriation of the Polish delegation on the obstacles placed by the Polish authorities in the repatriation of Poles from the RSFSR and the Ukrainian SSR // Documents and materials on the history of Soviet-Polish relations. Moscow, 1965. Vol. 4 : April 1921 – May 1926. P. 113–114 (in Russ.).

¹⁶NARB. Fund 40. Invent. 1. File 91. Sh. 40, 47, 51.

of foreign affairs of Poland in which he questioned the legitimacy of S. Sempalovska's activity as a representative of the Russian Red Cross Society. The letter criticised S. Sempalovska for her attempts to visit a camp for Red Army war prisoners and her demands that their living and medical circumstances be rectified. Citing art. XXXIII of the Repatriation agreement, S. Korsak insisted that the mandate of the Red Cross Society and its representatives in Poland only lasted until the work of the Mixed commission on repatriation began¹⁷. By that time, S. Sempolovska had been working in Polish prisoner-of-war camps since 1920. Based on the agreements between the Russian and Polish societies of the Red Cross concluded on 6 and 17 September 1920 in Berlin, the Polish Red Cross Society set up its representative offices in Russia. On 2 November 1920, a decision of the 2nd Department of the Headquarters of the Polish Ministry of War granted S. Sempolovska the authority to care for and aid all categories of Russian nationals, including "prisoners of war, internees, and civilian prisoners"¹⁸.

The first prisoner-of-war exchange between Poland and Minsk took place in December 1920. Mass exchanges began in March 1921, when 2,594 prisoners of war were dispatched to Poland, while 8,545 prisoners of war and 84 hostages returned from Poland via Minsk. The first repatriation train with 1,383 refugees departed for Poland via Minsk in April. The numbers rose significantly when the joint commissions got to work in Moscow and Warsaw, according to a report on the activities of the commission for the Western region and BSSR dated 3 October 1921. There were roughly 20,000 repatriates by the end of May. Two Polish representatives (J. Zmieczkowski and A. Laszkiewicz) and two Russian-Ukrainian envoys (M. I. Stokovski and Y. A. Wojtyga) were sent to expedite the formalities. However, the Polish envoys declined to endorse the lists of refugees prepared by Belarusian administration for evacuation of population. A month later, two Polish delegates travelled to Moscow with M. I. Stokovski to set up a permanent section of the Mixed commission on repatriation in the BSSR. As a result, in early July 1921, delegates from the Polish side and the Russian-Ukrainian commissioners who had previously been appointed as permanent members arrived in Minsk, where a branch of the Mixed commission on repatriation for the Western region and BSSR was established, with one member from each side and four technical personnel. Commissioners oversaw the registration of repatriates, kept the lists of the deceased,

monitored the execution of the Repatriation agreement, provided help and supervision for refugees, and paid visits to detention facilities and camps. The bilateral commission resolved its cases by consensus. Representatives from Poland had the authority to put approval stamps on the lists and provide material support. W. Domaski led the Polish delegation, and M. I. Stokovski was in charge of the Russian-Ukrainian mission. The commission's area of responsibility included the BSSR and the Vitebsk, Gomel, and Smolensk provinces of the RSFSR. Essentially, the Polish delegation to the Mixed commission on repatriation was providing consular services to the Polish residents in its designated area. The Council of People's Commissars of the BSSR notified the Polish delegation to the Mixed commission on repatriation in Minsk of the BSSR's accession to the USSR on 21 July 1923¹⁹.

In 1921 between March and July 14,356 prisoners returned to Poland via Negoreloe station and 7,179 via Zdobunovo station. 46,337 refugees and other categories of repatriates returned to Poland from the RSFSR, BSSR, and 67,872 individuals were repatriated to the USSR. From July to December 1921 alone, 12,119 repatriates crossed the border at Negoreloe station and 3,791 at Zdobunovo station. Thereafter, the numbers dwindled. From the beginning of mass repatriation in March 1921 to mid-1922, as many as 34,839 prisoners of war returned to Poland²⁰. In an interview with the newspaper "Warsaw Voice" on 29–30 July 1921, the head of the Russian-Ukrainian delegation, E. N. Ignatov, stated that as of 23 July, a total of 39,191 prisoners and refugees had crossed the border from Poland into Russia and Ukraine²¹.

In June 1920, the Polish bureau under the Smolensk Provincial Committee of the Russian Communist party of the Bolsheviks (RCP (b)) requested in its letter to the Polish bureau under the Central Committee of the RCP (b) that it conducts political propaganda among the Polish war prisoners. "The relevance and seriousness of the issue of the captured Poles have grown increasingly clear throughout the military operations on the Western front against bourgeois Poland", – read the letter. "From its direct observation, the Smolensk Polish bureau is convinced that the Polish communists must actively participate in the agitation and propaganda among the Polish prisoners, and take charge of this work, with the aid of their Communist party bodies. The Polish army is disintegrating, and our campaigns are invariably successful among the captured soldiers, some of whom can

¹⁷Letter from the Polish delegations to the Mixed Russian-Ukrainian-Polish commission on repatriation to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs regarding the activities of the representative of the Russian Red Cross Society in Warsaw S. Sempolovska // Documents and materials on the history of Soviet-Polish relations. Moscow, 1965. Vol. 4 : April 1921 – May 1926. P. 29–30 (in Russ.).

¹⁸Archiwum Akt Nowych (AAN). Zespół PRM. 16315/15. Sh. 5.

¹⁹NARB. Fund 7. Invent. 1. File 8. Sh. 46.

²⁰Ibid. Fund 39. Invent. 1. File 338.

²¹The report of the newspaper "Warsaw Voice" about the interview of the chairman of the Russian-Ukrainian delegation of the Mixed commission for repatriation E. N. Ignatov to the newspaper about the obstacles placed by the Polish side in the implementation of the Riga peace treaty // Documents and materials on the history of Soviet-Polish relations. Moscow, 1965. Vol. 4 : April 1921 – May 1926. P. 42–45 (in Russ.).

become prospective leaders of the revolutionary struggle for workers' power in Poland"²² (hereinafter translated by us. – O. B.).

The extent of the Soviet leadership's propaganda among the repatriates was well known to the Polish side. To check the flow of political undesirables, it took steps to slow the repatriation process. On 15 August 1921, the Ministry of the Interior of Poland issued a special directive to stop the arrival of "subversive elements" into Polish territory²³. As a result, a sizable group of Polish refugees assembled at the border. The Soviet government proposed to open more entry points and increase the throughput of the existing ones, but these initiatives went unanswered²⁴.

Apart from slowing the flow of refugees and prisoners of war, the Polish government (Prisoners and internees department under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Poland) initially sought to verify documents (identification cards, prisoner-of-war cards, and other relevant materials) more thoroughly. It could take up to several weeks, to verify the identity of a prisoner of war, since many lacked the documentation to substantiate their personal information or were using documents they had received as prisoners or in somebody else's name. It was crucial to learn about the prisoner's conduct while being held captive. From all this information, the Polish authorities would identify those who might be sent as returning prisoners to conduct subversive activity on Polish soil. Details of such persons were forwarded to the 2nd Department of the Ministry of Military Affairs Headquarters, and other military and police bodies²⁵.

In his opening remarks at the first joint meeting of the Mixed commission on repatriation in Warsaw on 28 February 1921, the head of the Polish delegation, S. Korsak, recalled: "Despite the treaty, the Polish authorities have still not abandoned the view that our prisoners of war are somehow like enemies, and have subjected them to various forms of persecution"²⁶.

Assigning a Polish delegate to be present for the customs inspection of the Polish repatriates' luggage was brought up during the Mixed commission on repatriation session on 22 November 1921. The Polish side's appeal, nevertheless, was turned down because it could slow down the work of the customs officers. Furthermore, a Polish official had no power to influence the examination of the luggage. K. I. Tsykhousky, an ethnic Pole and a member of the Russian-Ukrainian delegation was permitted to be present at the inspection²⁷.

A letter from Poland's charge d'affaires in the RSFSR, T. Filipowicz, to the People's commissar of foreign affairs, G. V. Chicherin, dated 18 September 1921, posed an ultimatum before the Soviet government demanding that it resolve by 1 October the issues in the repatriation process that the Polish side had raised. In a response note on 22 September 1921, G. V. Chicherin insisted that the repatriation was making satisfactory progress. Tensions in the Polish-Soviet relations were impacting the course of the repatriation and were slowing its progress. The parties were trading accusations and ultimatums and threatening to break off diplomatic relations, all of which brought the work of the crossing point at the Negoreloe station to an almost complete halt²⁸.

A protocol outlining the requirements for the Riga peace treaty's execution was signed on 7 October 1921, when the RSFSR's plenipotentiary envoy in Warsaw, L. M. Karakhan, and Poland's acting Minister of foreign affairs, J. Dąbski, met. The protocol's signatories agreed to establish joint commissions and commissions on re-evacuation. In addition, Poland agreed to deport several individuals suspected of anti-Soviet activity (such as V. Savinkov and D. Odinets) and pay the Soviet side for the damage to its railway property. Both sides would start securing their borders to stop the entry of rogue elements, etc.²⁹

The Tsentrevak announced the dissolution of its local offices in December 1921. Consistent with its directive of 5 January 1922, the district offices for evacuation were closed in February and the provincial offices in March 1922. Instead, base evacuation sites and line evacuation points were established at major railway stations, but not in all provinces. These started operating in 1922. Evacuation sites were eliminated in the second half of 1922, and starting from 1 July free transportation for famine refugees was discontinued. The processing of paperwork for refugees to leave the country was given to the administrative departments of the provincial executive committees, following the dissolution of the Tsentrevak and its local organisations³⁰.

The decision to halt the work of the repatriation commission was communicated to R. Knoll, the designated representative for Polish affairs, in a letter issued by Y. S. Ganetski, member of the board of the People's Commissariat of Foreign Affairs (PCFA) of the RSFSR, on 31 January 1923. The cause for this was the decline in the numbers applying to leave the republics be-

²²RSASPH. Fund 63. Invent. 1. File 240. Sh. 88 rev.

²³AAN. Zespół PRM. 16318. Sh. 17.

²⁴Ibid. Sh. 23–27.

²⁵Centralne archiwum wojskowe. 4 Armia. Sygn. 1.311.4.329.

²⁶Minutes of the meeting of the Mixed commission on repatriation // Documents and materials on the history of Soviet-Polish relations. Moscow, 1965. Vol. 3 : April 1920 – March 1921. P. 514 (in Russ.).

²⁷NARB. Fund 40. Invent. 1. File 91. Sh. 75.

²⁸Ibid. File 17. Sh. 12.

²⁹Protocol on the conditions for the implementation of the Riga peace treaty, signed by the vice Minister of foreign affairs of Poland J. Dąbski and the plenipotentiary representative of the RSFSR in Warsaw L. M. Karakhan // Documents and materials on the history of Soviet-Polish relations. Moscow, 1965. Vol. 4 : April 1921 – May 1926. P. 86–89 (in Russ.).

³⁰NARB. Fund 39. Invent. 1. File 337. Sh. 75.

low 20,000. As a result, it was no longer deemed necessary to continue running a designated system and procedure for repatriation. For these reasons, the Soviet Union declared that its delegation's work with the Mixed commission on repatriation had come to an end. As of 15 February 1923, evacuation trains were no longer used. The Polish government was invited to follow suit and handle any remaining issues through normal diplomatic channels. In response, the Polish side suggested extending the mandate of the repatriation commission in Moscow through 1 February 1925, and of its branches (in Kyiv, Kharkiv, and Minsk) through 15 January 1924, a further year. From 10 February through 3 May 1923, negotiations and communication were ongoing. The People's Commissariat of Internal Affairs of the RSFSR sent a circular letter to its provincial divisions on 4 June 1923, shutting the window for submitting repatriation requests on 1 June and establishing 1 August 1923, as the last day for departure³¹. On the Polish government's request, the departure date for individuals who had registered was extended to 1 October. The PCFA of the USSR informed the Polish side once more in a letter dated 14 June 1923, that the final deadline for repatriation from Russia to Poland and vice versa was 1 October.

After that date, individual repatriation was to be handled by diplomatic missions. 111,830 people in total returned to Poland in the first half of 1923³².

On 25 June 1924, the Mixed commission on repatriation declared that mass repatriation would be suspended. A formal circular explaining the departure process and paperwork requirements would be issued by the appropriate administrative organisations. Russian telegraph agency reported on 21 May 1924, that a total of 1,110,000 repatriates returned to Poland between April 1921 and April 1924. Of this number, 45.9 % were ethnic Poles, and around 51.7 % were ethnic Ukrainians, Belarusians and Russians [14]. According to Polish sources, approximately 1.5 million ethnic Poles remained and did not exercise their right to return home. 1,264,731 persons had returned to Poland from the RSFSR, the Ukrainian SSR, and the BSSR by the time the Mixed commission on repatriation final protocol was signed on 30 August 1924 [14]. The commission's operations and mass repatriation were therefore deemed to have terminated on 1 September 1924. The Polish delegation forwarded all repatriation cases that had not been resolved by 1 September to the consular division of its diplomatic mission for resolution in diplomatic order³³.

Conclusions

Throughout the interwar years, the exchange of prisoners of war and other repatriates was both pressing and complicated. It was given a high profile during the Riga peace conference, where a separate commission was set up to work on a Repatriation treaty and its addendums (signed on 24 February 1921), and also on the articles of the Riga peace treaty of 18 March 1921, that established the regulatory and legal frameworks for the repatriation process. The Mixed commission on repatriation organised and managed the exchange of prisoners of war and other categories of repatriates. Repatriation encompassed hostages, political prisoners, internees, prisoners of war, refugees, and emigrants. In practice, the commission acted as a monitoring and directing body. In Belarus, local evacuation committees actively participated in the essential activities linked to the repatriation of refugees to their home countries. A repatriation system was developed as a result of this work, which was able to complete the return of more than 1.5 million people from March 1921 to December 1924, despite frequent disruptions that delayed trains at the border and worsened the sanitary situation.

Unsatisfactory organisation and slow pace were characteristics of official repatriation. The closure of the local offices of the Tsentrek in 1922–1923, slowed the pace of the mass return and resulted in repeated suspensions of registration for free departure. The dispatch of repatriates who could not return on their own continued until 1925 when they were finally declared Soviet citizens. The repatriation of prisoners of war came to an end in 1925. They then had the option to exit the country through a process designed for foreign nationals.

The Mixed commission on repatriation activity was directly impacted by the state of the bilateral ties between Poland and the Soviet Union. The signing of the Riga peace treaty in March 1921 did not result in the peaceful resolution of outstanding bilateral disputes. Some of the treaty's provisions were not fulfilled, including with regard to repatriation. Backlogs of refugees at the border, a brief closure of the border point at the Negoreloe station, and delays in the re-evacuation of prisoners of war followed the build-up of tensions in the bilateral relations between the parties.

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³¹ Arch. of Foreign Policy of Russ. Federation. Fund 122. Invent. 6. File 41. Sh. 105.

³² Ibid. Sh. 152.

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