

Russian memory about the Second World War **and Auschwitz concentration camp.**

The Second World War represents the example of extreme experience that does not have any analogues in the past and, I expect, in the future. In spite of the fact that sixty seven years past from the end of the War, it still has lasting effects on the war and after-war generations. In such circumstances the main question is how this experience influences the process of construction of memory about the war in Russian society?

In my lecture I am planning to stop mainly on the contemporary Russian vision of the Second World War and Auschwitz as its integral part, because, as you understand, the subject of the war is very wide and it is impossible to reflect all its sides during one report. One more reason for concentration on analyzing the period of last years is the new tendencies that appear in perception of the history of the Second World War in comparison with the Soviet period. And in comparison with the legacy of Soviet memorial policy these tendencies look like quite positive.

According to the public opinion polls, which were carried out by Russian center of studying the public opinion, 87 % of the respondents appreciated the victory in the Great Patriotic War as one of the most important events that determined the fortune of Russia in the twenty century. It is also should be mentioned that the importance of the victory constantly rose in the perception of Russian citizens. So if in 1996 only 44 % of respondents to the question “What event in the history of Russia stir up your pride?” answered that it was the victory in the Great Patriotic War, in 2003 this quantity rose to 87 % of the respondents. It is obvious that it was the result of Putin’s memory policy that today is also actual. In Russian official discourse the victory in the Great Patriotic War, not in the Second World War, but I repeat in the Great Patriotic War, became the main symbol of the war memory. The price of the victory was very high, practically every family lost relatives during the war, but finally this victory became the symbol that integrated Russian nation. In my opinion there is one bright example

that illustrates the significance of the victory in modern Russia. It is the social movement St. George Ribbon. For the first time it started on the eve of 60th anniversary of the victory in the Great Patriotic War, it was initiated by the news agency “RIA Novosti” and one of the Students societies. During the period from 24 of April to 9 of May St. George ribbons were distributed by free among the citizens of different Russian cities. The aim of movement was the demonstration of respect and gratitude to the veterans. In 2005 there were distributed 800 000 ribbons. In 2006 St. George Ribbon movement crossed the borders of Russia and there were distributed 4 millions of ribbons. From that time the action St. George Ribbon is carried out every year in more then 30 countries all over the world. According to the public opinion pools the most part of the respondents say that this movement provokes mainly positive emotions. But on the other hand there is such estimation of this action that it is the flesh mob, which is held by Putin administration in attempt of bureaucratization of human memory.

At the same time I should mention another tendency that have place in contemporary professional discourse about the Second World War. It is connected with the transformation of the war appreciation, now it is more and more percept like the ordinary event, but not the sacral one. What are the reasons of such transformation? At first, the change of generations provokes the process of rewriting the history. This tendency has the objective nature, because the time distance that divide us from the war events become bigger, and young generation asks new questions, which are also actual for the time they live in. The second reason is that the bigger the time distance the higher the risk that the translation of social memory from one generation to another will break off. From year to year the quantity of people who were the eye-witnesses of the war diminishes. At third, the interest to the history of memory and the ways of its translation make the scientists to determine the place of this knowledge in the society life. In that case I speak about oral history.

Now the situation with the studying of war history changed in such way, that there is the possibility of interchange of different points of view not only inside

Russia, but also with the international society. Now among the subjects of scientific investigation there are such ones as the war every day life, the psychology of the war, the war crimes committed during Red army West campaign, Stalin terror of 1937-38, the war with Finland, anti-Semitism, collaboration on the soviet territory and others subject. In Soviet times it was impossible even to imagine that someone study such forbidden topics.

One more change in Russian scientific historical society is the emergence of different non-state scientific organizations like the international organization “Memorial”, the Center Holocaust and German historical institute in Moscow. These institutions support the publication of different break historical research, for example, with the support of German historical institute in Moscow was translated and published Norbert Frei monograph “Führer state: the power of national-socialists”. Unfortunately the edition of such publications is not very high and usually it is practically impossible to find them in the province book shops. At the same time these break investigations do not find the reflection in school literature. For example, the only information about Nazi concentration camp system that there is in school books is the following: “The concentration camps in Poland and in Germany became factories of death. The extermination program was signed and this meant the final solution of the Jewish question”. Nothing else followed. The poor information and its impersonal character impart only formal knowledge and lead to indifference of the pupils.

At the same time the international organization “Memorial” and the Center Holocaust systematically organize different research competitions for pupils, students, school teachers and other researchers. The main quantities of the competition works are connected with the war history, many of them are devoted to the family histories connected with the war. So thanks to these competitions the history of the war receives the face of the separate individuals. This is the big change in comparison with the Soviet perception of the war history when the war memory had the face of the hero, the Unknown Soldier, who was presented like “strong and not married man without nationality with the whole life ahead”. In

Soviet war literature there were no name, only military leaders wrote their recollections, which were always connected with the glorious victory.

In the field of memorial policy Russia, like the descendent of the Soviet Union, follows the approach that is very close to the soviet memory about the Great Patriotic War. The soviet legacy has the strongest impact on modern perception of the war history. It means that still the sufferings and heroism of the Soviet people in the war with Germany and the allies are underlined during the ceremonies and in the official publications. But on the other hand in modern Russia we can see the readiness to admit mistakes, which were committed by the soviet administration in the war time and produced such big suffering among Soviet civil people. There is also the change in connection with Holocaust, in modern Russia in contrast with Soviet time this phenomenon is recognized, but still does not have special status. I will try to suppose that the main reason for the rejection of the official recognition of the Holocaust uniqueness is the rise of Russian nationalism, produced in its turn by the lack of literature about the Nazi crimes committed in concentration camps, especially in Auschwitz. In Russia there are neither complex scientific works about the whole Nazi concentration camp system, nor about separate concentration camps. In 2010 there were defended two theses about Ravensbrück and Mauthausen concentration camps, but they are not published, it is possible to get acquainted with them only in libraries.

As for Auschwitz concentration camp for the most part of Russians the word Auschwitz does not have any sense, it is estimated like unknown German word. The biggest concentration camp is associated with the name Oswiecim, and practically nobody knows that it is the name of the old polish city. The information about this place appears in mass media mainly in connection with the anniversary of concentration camp liberation. But for Russia 27of January is also the day when the blockade of Leningrad finished. So very often the information about the end of blockade overshadows the news from the celebrating ceremonies in Oswiecim.

As for the visiting of Auschwitz site the situation with tourists from Russia is very scaring. In the museum annual report there is a section with the table of

visitors' quantity from different countries. I analyzed these reports for the last five years and found out that during one year only about 2000 Russian tourists visit Auschwitz-Birkenau state museum. Such quantity of tourists places Russia on the last position in this table of visitors, and for example in 2009 Russia was not presented in the museum report at all, being placed in the category "Visitors from the other countries". This number of 2000 tourists is formed by individual visitors. I would like to give an example. In modern Russia there is big interest for bus tour through the whole Europe, practically, all of these tour start and finish in Poland in Warsaw or in Terespol. Very often the tour program supposes the visit to Krakow, sometimes the night in Krakow. In that case after the excursion around the city, the tourists are usually offered to visit Velichka, salt mine in 60 km from Krakow, and never Auschwitz-Birkenau state museum in Oswiecim, which is also located at a distance of 60 km from Krakow. So in Auschwitz there are no organized groups with tourists from Russia. The only ones that come to this site are formed by Voronezh regional center of oral history. The first such group came to Oswiecim in December 2005, the latest one, by I expect not the last one, visited this city in June 2012. All our groups consisted of students and lecturers from different Voronezh universities, in the latest group there were also school teachers. Our groups come to Oswiecim to take part in multi-days seminars named "The person in circumstances of concentration camp", one time we were guests of the Center for dialogue and prayer and took part in the Russian – Polish seminar "Different memory about the Second World War, common responsibility for the future".

But I would like to stop attention on the group visit of 2012, because it became the conclusion of another scientific project of Voronezh regional center of oral history named "The oral history and the problems of studying the Second World War". During the academic year 2011-2012 Regional center organized special course of lectures connected with different aspects of the Second World War history. The lecturers were the scientist from different Russian cities and from Germany. The course was also supplemented by the trip to Moscow to the Museum of the Great Patriotic War and the Museum of the Holocaust and Jewish legacy;

both of them are the parts of museum ensemble on Poklonnaya Hill. We also organized the meeting of the course listeners with the survivors of Auschwitz and Neungamme concentration camps. Why did I also want to stop attention on visit of 2012, because it was the first our trip to Oswiecim that was partly sponsored by the Voronezh region. Such financial support evidence that government starts to pay attention to the problem of memory about the Second World War and concentration camp system as its integral part. The attention to the problem of Auschwitz is more important, because it was not ordinary concentration camp; it was the place where “the final solution of Jewish question” was implemented.

So I stopped your attention only on some points of Russian modern historical policy about the Second World War. It is impossible to reflect all sides of this complicated question. I did not touch the policy of memory in Soviet Union, because it is quite well known subject. But I expect that you received some impression about contemporary memorial policy.