

CIS informal summit • President of Russia



The summit was attended by Vladimir Putin, President of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev, Prime Minister of Armenia Nikol Pashinyan, President of Belarus Alexander Lukashenko, first President of Kazakhstan Nursultan Nazarbayev, President of Kyrgyzstan Sooronbay Jeenbekov, President of Moldova Igor Dodon, President of Tajikistan Emomali Rahmon

and President of Turkmenistan Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov.

Vladimir Putin told the participants about the archive materials on the pre-history of World War II and invited them to tour a specially organised exhibit.

* * *

Speech at the informal CIS summit

President of Russia Vladimir Putin: Colleagues, I am very happy to see you. I would like to welcome you once again, in this “very extended” format of CIS heads of state.

We have resolved on events dedicated to the end of the Great Patriotic War between the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany and the Victory of the Soviet Union.

Let me stress that for all of us, and I know you agree, it is a special date because our fathers and grandfathers sacrificed a lot to our Fatherland, our common Fatherland back then. In fact, every family in the former Soviet Union in one way or another suffered from what happened with our country and the world.

We have discussed this many times both formally and informally and decided to work together on the eve of the 75th anniversary. I would like to share some of my thoughts on this.

I was surprised, even somewhat hurt by one of the latest European Parliament resolutions dated September 19, 2019 “on the importance of preserving historical memory for the future of Europe.” We, too, have always strived to ensure the quality of history, its truthfulness, openness and objectivity. I want to emphasise once again that this applies to all of us, because we are to some extent descendants of the former Soviet Union. When they talk about the Soviet Union, they talk about us.

What does it say? According to this paper, the so-called Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact (the foreign ministers of the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany), as they write further, divided Europe and the territories of independent states between two totalitarian regimes, which paved the way for World War II. The Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact ‘paved the way to WWII...’ Well, maybe.

In addition, the European parliamentarians are demanding that Russia stop its efforts aimed at distorting historical facts and promoting the thesis that Poland, the Baltic countries and the West really started the war. I do not think we have ever said anything like this, or that any of the above countries were the perpetrators.

Where is the truth after all? I decided to figure this out and asked my colleagues to check the archives. When I started reading them, I found something that I think would be interesting for all of us, because, again, we all come from the Soviet Union.

Here is the first question. We talk about the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact all the time. We repeat this after our European colleagues. This begs the question: was this the only document signed by one of the European countries, back then the Soviet Union, with Nazi Germany? It turns out that this is not at all the case. I will simply give a list of them, if I may.

So, the Declaration on the Non-use of Force between Germany and Poland. This is, in fact, the so-called Pilsudski-Hitler Pact signed in 1934. In essence, this is a non-aggression pact.

Then, the Anglo-German maritime agreement of 1935. Great Britain provided Hitler with an opportunity to have his own Navy, which was illegal for him or, in fact, reduced to a minimum following World War I.

Then, the joint Anglo-German declaration of Chamberlain and Hitler signed on September 30, 1938, which they agreed upon at Chamberlain’s initiative. It said that the signed ‘Munich Agreement, as well as the Anglo-German maritime agreement symbolise...’ and so on. The creation of a legal framework between the two states continued.

That is not all. There is the Franco-German Declaration signed on December 6, 1938 in Paris by the foreign ministers of France and Germany, Bonnet and Ribbentrop.

Finally, the treaty between the Republic of Lithuania and the German Reich signed on March 22, 1939 in Berlin by the foreign minister of Lithuania and Ribbentrop to the effect that Klaipeda Territory will reunite with the German Reich.

Then, there was the Nonaggression Treaty between the German Reich and Latvia of June 7, 1939.

Thus, the Treaty between the Soviet Union and Germany was the last in a line of treaties signed by European countries that seemed to be interested in maintaining peace in Europe. Also, I want to note that the Soviet Union agreed to sign this document only after all other avenues had been exhausted and all proposals by the Soviet Union to create a unified security system, in fact, an anti-Nazi coalition in Europe were rejected.

In this connection, I am asking you to take a few minutes to return to the origins, to the very beginning, which I find very important. I suggest beginning, as they say, from ‘centre field’, as they say, I mean from the results from World War I, from the Versailles Peace conditions written in the Treaty of Versailles in 1919.

For Germany, the Treaty of Versailles became a symbol of blatant injustice and national humiliation. In fact, it meant robbing Germany. I will give you some numbers, because they are very interesting.

Germany had to pay the Triple Entente countries (Russia left the winners and did not sign the Treaty of Versailles) an astronomical sum of 269 billion golden marks, the equivalent of 100,000 tonnes of gold. For comparison, I would say the gold reserves as of October 2019 are 8,130 tonnes in the US, 3,370 tonnes in Germany and 2,250 tonnes in Russia.

And Germany had to pay 100,000 tonnes. At the current price of gold of \$1,464 for a troy ounce, the reparations would be worth about \$4.7 trillion, while the German GDP in 2018 prices, if my data are correct, is only \$4 trillion.

Suffice it to say that the last payments of 70 million euros were made quite recently, on October 3, 2010. Germany was still paying for World War I on the 20th anniversary of the Federal Republic of Germany.

I believe, and many, including researchers, agree that the so-called spirit of Versailles created an environment for a radical and revanchist mood. The Nazis were actively exploiting Versailles in their propaganda promising to relieve Germany of this national shame, so the West gave the Nazis a free hand for revenge.

For reference, I can say that the man behind the French victory in World War I, Marshal Ferdinand Foch, the French commander, spoke about the results of the Treaty of Versailles and once uttered a famous prophecy, I quote: "This is not peace. It is an armistice for twenty years." He was right even about the time.

US President Woodrow Wilson warned that giving Germany reason to avenge one day would be a big mistake. The internationally renowned Winston Churchill wrote that the economic articles of the treaty were vicious and stupid to the point of being clearly meaningless.

The Versailles world order gave rise to many conflicts and disagreements. They are based on the borders of new states arbitrarily drawn up in Europe by the winners of World War I. That is, the borders were reshaped. This created conditions for the so-called Sudeten crisis. Sudetenland was part of Czechoslovakia where the German population lived. Here is a reference document about the Sudeten crisis and the ensuing so-called Munich Conference.

In 1938, 14 million people lived in Czechoslovakia, of which 3.5 million were ethnic Germans. On September 13, 1938, a rebellion broke out there, and Great Britain immediately proposed talking to Hitler and appeasing him in order to keep the peace. I will not bore you with the details of the correspondence and talks, but they led to the signing of the well-known Munich agreement.

To reiterate, we used some archive materials. I want to explain some of them. We have an encrypted message from the Soviet Plenipotentiary Envoy to France to the People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs Litvinov dated May 25, 1938, about a confidential conversation with French Prime Minister Daladier.

I will read an excerpt, as it is an interesting document. "Prime Minister of France, Eduard Daladier, has devoted the past several days to clarifying Poland's position." This refers to the Munich Agreement, as a result of which Sudetenland, part of Czechoslovak territory, was supposed to go to Germany. "The probe in Poland gave an utterly negative result,' the Prime Minister of France said. "Not only can we not rely on Polish support, but there is no certainty that Poland will not stab us in the back." Contrary to Polish assurances, Daladier does not believe in the Poles' loyalty, even if Germany were to directly attack France. He demanded a clear and unambiguous answer from the Poles as to whose side they are on in peace and in war. In this regard, he asked the Polish ambassador to France, Juliusz Łukasiewicz, a number of direct questions. He asked him if the Poles would let Soviet troops pass through their territory. Łukasiewicz said no. Daladier then asked if they would let Soviet planes fly across their territory. Łukasiewicz said the Poles would open fire on them. When Łukasiewicz said no to the question of whether Poland would come to the rescue if after a German attack on Czechoslovakia (there was an agreement on mutual assistance between France and Czechoslovakia)... Germany declares war on France. The Polish representative said no. Daladier said he saw no reason in a Franco-Polish alliance and the sacrifices that France is making as part of it."

So what does this mean? It means the Soviet Union was ready to help Czechoslovakia, which Nazi Germany was going to rob. But the agreement between the Soviet Union and Czechoslovakia stated that the Soviet Union would do this only if France fulfilled its obligations to Czechoslovakia. France linked its aid to Czechoslovakia to support from Poland. But Poland refused to provide it.

The following document is this document No. 5 in front of me, which I have just spoken about. Let us go ahead. The sixth document.

What did the Polish authorities do when Germany began to claim part of Czechoslovak territory? They also laid claim to their part of the "prey" during the partitioning of Czechoslovak territory and demanded that a certain part of Czechoslovakia be transferred to them. Moreover, they were ready to use force. They formed a special military group called 'Silesia,' which included three infantry divisions, a cavalry brigade and other units.

There is also a specific document from the archives. From a report from a commander of the Silesia Independent Operation Group, a Mr Bortnowski on preparations for the offensive operation, the capture of Tesin Silesia and the training of troops, the Polish authorities trained and sent militants to Czechoslovakia to carry out sabotage and terrorist attacks and actively prepare for the partitioning and occupation of Czechoslovakia.

The next document is a record of a conversation between German Ambassador to Poland Mr Moltke and Polish Foreign Minister, Mr Beck. In this document, Polish Foreign Minister Beck spoke directly about this, I quote: "In the areas claimed by Poland, there will be no conflict with German interests." Therefore, there will be a division of Czechoslovak territory.

Immediately after the Munich Agreement was concluded on September 30, 1938, Warsaw, having imitated in fact Nazi methods, sent an ultimatum to Prague with an unconditional claim for part of the territory of Czechoslovakia – Tesin Silesia. France and Great Britain did not support Czechoslovakia, which forced it to yield to this violence. Simultaneously with Germany, which annexed Sudetenland, Poland began a direct seizing of Czechoslovak territory on October 1, 1938, thereby violating the agreement it had previously concluded with Czechoslovakia.

The next document tells about the final agreement to set the border between Poland and Czechoslovakia. Here is what this is about: on July 28, 1920, with the arbitration of the Triple Entente, Poland and Czechoslovakia signed the so-called final

border agreement, which gave the western part of Czechoslovakia's Cieszyn Region to the Czechs and the eastern part to Warsaw. Both parts officially recognised and, more importantly, guaranteed their shared border.

Of course, Poland understood that without Hitler's support all attempts to seize part of Czechoslovakia were doomed to fail. In this context, I would like to cite a very interesting document: a recorded conversation between German Ambassador in Warsaw Hans-Adolf von Moltke and Josef Beck about Polish-Czech relations and the USSR's position on this from October 1, 1938.

The German ambassador reports to his superiors in Berlin. Mr Beck – let me remind you that he was the Foreign Minister of Poland – expressed his deep gratitude for the loyal interpretation of Polish interests at the Munich conference as well as for the sincere relations during the Czech conflict. The Polish government and people credited Hitler and the Reichskanzler, which means he was grateful for Hitler's actions at the conference in Munich.

It is noteworthy that representatives of Poland were not invited to the Munich conference, and that their interests were in fact represented by Hitler.

At this point Poland assumed the role of instigator: it tried to draw Hungary into the division of Czechoslovakia, which means deliberately pulling other countries into violating international law. It was well known to other European countries, including to both Great Britain and France, that Germany and Poland acted together.

To be continued.