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## France, Denmark, Sweden questioned conclusions of Katyn massacre investigation — archive

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MOSCOW, April 12. /TASS/. France, Denmark and Sweden disagreed with the conclusions of the international commission organized by Nazi Germany to investigate the Katyn massacre, in which Polish officers and soldiers were shot by order of the Soviet authorities in 1940, according to documents declassified by the Smolensk branch of the Russian Federal Security Service (FSB).

"At the [final] meeting it became clear that the opinions of the commission members differed. The representatives of France, Denmark and Sweden stated that, in their opinion, it was only possible to establish the existence of a crime, but not to identify the perpetrators. The representatives of Finland, Hungary and Spain said that, despite the lack of sufficient scientific data, they considered it proven that the shooting of the Poles in 1940 was carried out by the Soviets. The other members of the commission merely paid lip service to [the head of the commission, Professor Gerhard] Butz and did not clearly state their opinion. Despite the differences of opinion among the commissioners, the final protocol was signed by all of them," the declassified testimony of German technician, army member

Ludwig Schneider said.

He said that in private conversations, commission members were more open about expressing doubts about Butz's work. "The Dane, who shared his thoughts on the commission's work, told me that the whole investigation made a depressing impression on him and that the results were very inconclusive," Schneider pointed out. According to him, the members of the commission arrived in Smolensk from Berlin on a special plane at the end of April 1943. The commission worked from May 2 to May 8, 1943. "The corpses had been prepared in advance, and neither the members of the commission nor we, the employees of Butz's laboratory, were ever present when the graves were opened. As a result, I had the impression that these bodies had been brought from somewhere else. <...> The appearance of the corpses and the well-preserved parts of their uniforms could not indicate that they had been in the ground for such a long time. Individual members of the commission pointed this out even before the results of the analysis had been clarified," the testimony said.

According to Schneider, the head of the commission assured his fellow colleagues that the plantings on the graves had been made three years earlier, before the occupation of the Smolensk Region by German troops. "At the same time, the French representative objected in my presence, stating that the flora gave the impression of being 'younger' and asked Butz to provide relevant evidence. In reply, Butz referred to the opinion of a German army forester. The Frenchman, who was not satisfied with this answer, suggested to ask the local people, but Butz refused. He was warmly supported by the Hungarian representative, Professor Orsos, who remarked that 'this question is not so important at present'," the witness added.

The Swedish representative also stated that "so far there is only evidence of the crime committed, but the perpetrators have not been exposed." "The chairman of the commission, a Swiss, tried to smooth things over by saying that 'the idea of attributing the Katyn massacre to the Germans at all is unbelievable. <...> It was felt that the situation was heating up, but at that time dinner was served and the dispute subsided'," Schneider testified.

The name "Katyn massacre" comes from the Katyn forest near Russia's Smolensk, where mass graves of executed Polish prisoners of war were found in German-occupied territory in 1943. The discovery of the Katyn forest graves was first reported in 1943 by Rudolf-Christoph von Gersdorf, chief of intelligence for the German Army Group Center.

According to the testimony of forensic expert Imre Szecsody, presented in the published archive, a commission of experts consisting of doctors and pathologists from Germany, Hungary, Portugal, Switzerland and other Western countries traveled to Katyn at the same time. Their purpose was to examine the bodies of Polish prisoners of war. The commission included members of pro-fascist parties and organizations. For example, the Hungarian professor Ferenc Orsos, who in 1941 advocated the prohibition of marriages between Hungarians and Jews or Gypsies and then collaborated with the team of Otto Adolf Eichmann, known as the "architect of the Holocaust."

As a result, the commission concluded that the shootings were carried out by the Soviet People's Commissariat of Internal Affairs (NKVD) in the spring of 1940. The USSR denied the charges. After the liberation of Smolensk by Soviet troops, the Nikolay Burdenko Commission was established, which, after conducting its own investigation, concluded that Polish military personnel had been shot at Katyn in the fall of 1941 by German

occupation forces. This conclusion was the official view in the USSR and Warsaw Pact countries until 1990, when the Soviet government acknowledged the NKVD's responsibility for the crime.

In 2010, the Russian State Duma expressed "deep sympathy with all victims of unjustified repression, their relatives and friends." It also noted that in the early 1990s "the country took important steps to establish the truth about the Katyn tragedy." It was recognized that the mass extermination of Polish citizens on the territory of the USSR during World War II was an act of arbitrariness of the totalitarian state, which also subjected hundreds of thousands of Soviet citizens to repression for political and religious beliefs, social and other reasons.

In the fall of 2023, the Communist Party of the Russian Federation (CPRF) deputy Nikolay Ivanov proposed to repeal this Duma resolution as seriously damaging Russia's interests and reputation. In response, Duma Speaker Vyacheslav Volodin suggested forming a working group headed by Deputy Duma Speaker Pyotr Tolstoy and including representatives of all factions.