12 The Mass Deportations of the Polish Population to the USSR, 1940–1941

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INTRODUCTION

Among the Polish citizens who were deported to Soviet territory between September 1939 and June 1941 the following main categories can be identified:¹

A. Prisoners of war of all ranks, including those who fell into Soviet hands in the autumn of 1939 as well as those who initially were interned in Lithuania and Latvia, and excluding those who were either allowed to go home or were handed over to the Germans, estimated at 46,000. The total number of POWs remaining in the Soviet hands is estimated at 196,000, or approximately 12 per cent of the total number of Polish citizens deported to the USSR – estimated at 1,646,000.²

B. Civilian prisoners, mainly male but some female, who were considered by the Soviet authorities guilty (from the point of view of the Soviet law). These were arrested, imprisoned, submitted to lengthy and severe investigation and sentenced to death or a number of years in corrective labour camps. Their total number is estimated at 250,000 or some 15 per cent of the total number of Polish citizens taken to the USSR.

C. Men, women and children (often whole families) regarded by the Soviet authorities not as guilty, but as suspect, and therefore deported to distant parts of the USSR by an administrative decree, i.e. without the usual legal procedure based normally on arresting, charging and sentencing. This was by far the largest group, esti-
mated at 990 000, or 60 per cent of all Polish citizens deported to the USSR.\(^3\)

D. Young men born in 1918, 1919 and some in 1920 who were called-up into the Red Army or alternatively were sent to work in Soviet industry. Their estimated numbers are 210 000, i.e. 13 per cent of all the Polish deportees.

E. Those who found themselves in the USSR as ‘free people’. Among these there were some voluntary industrial workers, a small group of doctors who volunteered to work in the USSR, several groups of musicians and entertainers, one or two youth summer camps evacuated in front of the advancing German Army, communists and sympathisers who chose not to fall into German hands. Numerically these groups were small and they constituted a negligible percentage of the total number of Polish citizens taken to the USSR at that time.

This paper is devoted to category C – to those who were deported in an administrative manner from Poland to various distant parts of the Soviet Union.

On 20 September 1941, during one of the first meetings between the newly-appointed Polish ambassador in Moscow, Professor Stanisław Kot, and the deputy commissar of the People’s Commissariat of External Affairs (Narkomindel) Andrey Vishynsky, the latter explained the operation of the Soviet administrative penal system in the following manner:

In our country the administrative system in limiting freedom envisages the following three categories:

1. Individual deportation to a predetermined locality where the deportee lives quite freely and works in accordance with his or her choosing, but has no right to leave the locality and remains under police supervision.

2. Deportation to special settlements often provided with livestock and necessary tools, so called ‘specposiolky’ where the work is carried out in a normal manner and the deportee can benefit from complete freedom of movement within the vicinity; however he is not allowed to depart further than the nearest market town, or change his place of employment.