



Permanent Mission of the Republic of Poland
to the UN Office and the International Organizations in Vienna

**Right of reply to the Russian Federation
on Soviet and Russian monuments in Poland
delivered by the Mission of Poland
at the 1181th Meeting of the OSCE Permanent Council
(Vienna, 12th April 2018)**

Mr. Chairperson,

I would like to use my right of reply in response to the current issue raised by the Ambassador of the Russian Federation. The matter was addressed in the past in this hall, therefore I am sure that the Permanent Council will recall some of the points I am going to make today.

As our Delegation pointed out before, the Polish-Russian relations regarding cemeteries and graves are regulated by the *Agreement between the Government of the Republic of Poland and the Government of the Russian Federation on Graves and Memorial Sites of Victims of Wars and Repressions of 22 February 1994*.

The agreement concerns graves and war cemeteries, and does not apply to symbolic monuments (i.e. places without human remains) which are merely manifestations of the Soviet presence in Poland. Our position here is well known to the Russian side.

The new so called “decommunization bill” referred to by the Ambassador of the Russian Federation does not change this situation. The fundamental purpose of the amendment to the law on the prohibition of propagating communism or another totalitarian regime through names of buildings, streets or objects was to make a clean break with symbols of the totalitarian regime that brought so many victims and suffering - both to the Polish and Russian nations.

Once again it has to be stressed that the law does not refer to the cemeteries or other places where Soviet soldiers are buried and its goal is by no means to violate the memory of the Red Army soldiers, who lost their lives on the territory of Poland.

With regard to the cases of vandalism of the memorial sites – mentioned by the RF representative – the Polish government deeply deplores all such acts. Every incident is promptly and thoroughly investigated and the sites affected renovated with due diligence. A recent example is the Monument of the Liberation of Warmia and Mazury in Olsztyn (also mentioned in the Russian statement), which has been renovated and the vandals have been brought to justice.



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Let me show another example of the Polish attitude towards the historical places in Poland: the two exhumations that have taken place recently (moving of the remains of two Red Army soldiers from private properties to the Red Army cemeteries in Kędzierzyn-Koźle and Milejczyce in March) had been agreed with the Russian side and one of the ceremonies was even attended by Russian representatives, including officials from the Russian Embassy in Warsaw.

I should like to remind that since 1989, when Poland regained full sovereignty, none of the Russian or Soviet cemeteries has been closed down. All such cemeteries have been set up and renovated with funds allocated by the Polish state, in line with Polish legislation and pursuant to international commitments. Altogether on the Polish territory there are 1875 cemeteries and quarters of Russian and Soviet soldiers, including 718 where the Red Army soldiers are buried – both Russians and other nationals. Over the last 17 years Poland has spent more than 20 mln PLN for their renovation and maintenance.

We find that accusations of a “war against the monuments” do not contribute to our bilateral dialogue – they rather aim at covering up the ongoing process of re-Stalinization of Russia’s official narrative regarding the roots of the war, as well as the nature of the political system imposed on Poland by Soviets after 1945.

Furthermore, let me also point out that the issue of Soviet and Russian monuments in Poland and Polish monuments in the Russian Federation is continuously raised in direct contacts between our governments. Poland is undertaking steps to revive the Polish-Russian dialogue in line with the principles set out in the *Treaty on Friendly and Good-Neighbourly Cooperation of 22 May 1992*. The Polish authorities many a time expressed readiness to discuss difficult issues in our bilateral relations with Russia, including through direct contacts with the Russian Embassy in Warsaw and by using our bilateral Group on Difficult Issues. So far, the Polish initiatives have not been met with a constructive response by the Russian side. In this context, we wish to express our hope that the reconstruction of the Katyń memorial complex undertaken by the Russian side will not affect the Polish cemetery, which is part of the complex and is covered by our bilateral agreement. We would also be interested in learning more about the planned exhibition “Russia and Poland. XX century. Truth and remembrance.” and reiterate our readiness to cooperate in the preparations of this exhibition with the aim to ensure a dignified commemoration of the victims.

Thank you Mr. Chairperson.