

A b s t r a c t s

The Hitler-Stalin Pact The War and European Memory

Susanne Schattenberg

Diplomacy of Dictators

The Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact

The Hitler-Stalin pact came into being not only despite the differing systems, but on account of the many similarities between the two dictatorial states run. What was decisive was not that the two ideologies were mutually exclusive, but that the language of forms was almost identical: Both foreign ministers established a new diplomatic style that was almost the same in symbolism, tone, and tempo. The pact was neither the result of the old diplomats who achieved this rapprochement, nor primarily a fatal consequence of the failure of French and British policy. The pact was the product of a "diplomacy of dictators" who found real admiration for one another.

Werner Benecke

Unleashing the War

A Look Back at the Hitler-Stalin Pact

At the end of August 1939, Germany and the Soviet Union concluded a pact that officially obliged both parties to refrain from any kind of aggression against the other. In reality, the previously antagonistic dictatorships divided East Central Europe into spheres of influence. This surprising coup was more deeply rooted in the overall prewar situation in Europe than the hastily achieved agreements between Hitler and Stalin would suggest at first glance.

Marek Kornat

With Open Eyes

Polish Foreign Policy before the Hitler-Stalin Pact

In spring 1939, it was becoming clear that Poland could fall victim to the expansionist impulses of two dictatorships. Poland, however, did not meet Hitler's demands, nor did it allow the Red Army to enter its territory, as its Western allies insisted. However, the widespread claim that Poland bore a part of the blame for the Hitler-Stalin pact is untenable. Warsaw's distrust vis-à-vis Stalin proved instead to be justified. That the allied Western powers would leave Poland in the lurch and thus give not only Hitler but also Stalin a free hand in Poland lay outside the imagination of Polish diplomacy.

Sergei Sluch

Down a Blind Alley

The Soviet Union and the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact

The Munich Agreement of 1938 showed how isolated the Soviet Union was. In order to regain freedom of manoeuvre on the world stage, Stalin pinned his hopes on the common ground between Soviet Russia and Nazi Germany. Efforts to achieve a rapprochement in economics and trade failed. Although the Nazi regime needed raw materials to prepare for war, Hitler did not seek any kind of long-term rapprochement with the Soviet Union. Stalin was counting on an "imperialist war" between Germany and the Western powers and tried to prevent the Soviet Union from sliding into war on the side of the latter. The agreement with Nazi Germany came to have priority. The Molotov-Ribbentrop pact guaranteed spheres of influence and expansion in the realm of foreign policy, something the Soviet Union never would have received from the Western powers. But Hitler's main foreign policy goal, the conquest of the Soviet Union, remained in place beyond the Treaty of Non-aggression. Stalin drove his country down a blind alley of his own making.

Jürgen Zarusky

Hitler Means War

Germany and the Hitler-Stalin Pact

The Hitler-Stalin pact is rightly considered the classic example of totalitarian foreign policy. In the imperialist co-operation between the National Socialist and Stalinist regimes, different intentions and dynamics came together. Hitler stuck to his "Lebensraum" project in the Soviet east. The pact with Stalin in 1939 met Hitler's needs halfway, but it was only a tactical layover.

Michael David-Fox

Rapprochement of Extremes

The Soviet Union and Right-Wing Intellectuals

The Hitler-Stalin pact was not only a shock. In a certain way, it was also the continuation of an obscure relationship that the Communist left and the Fascist right had cultivated in the 1920s and 1930s. The Soviet All-Union Society for Cultural Relations with the Abroad maintained contacts with bourgeois nationalists, intellectuals of the Conservative Revolution, and the Working Group for the Study of the Soviet-Russian Plan Economy. The solicitation of the radical right was controversial, but it belonged to the obligatory policy of Soviet diplomacy.

Bernhard H. Bayerlein
Taking Leave of a Myth

The Soviet Union, the Comintern, and Antifascism

The Soviet Union's antifascism is one bastion of leftwing thinking that is hardly ever contested. Even Stalin's pact with Hitler could not destroy it, for the Treaty of Non-aggression was considered but a short-term tactical manoeuvre. In fact, however, Stalin had an alliance with National Socialist Germany in mind throughout the entire 1930s. Instead of denouncing the Nazis' campaign of terror against German Communists, Soviet policy continued to be directed against Social Democracy – defamed as “social fascism” – until 1934. Moscow also brought the Comintern into line. Despite an alliance with the Western powers and the People's Front policy in the mid-1930s, Stalin kept all of his options open. After the pact, the Communist parties that had been forced into line had to call the Soviet Union and the German Reich the camp of world peace.

Michail Ryklin
Requiem for a Dream

Walter Benjamin and the Hitler-Stalin Pact

The Hitler-Stalin pact struck many West European intellectuals like a bolt of lightning. It destroyed their belief in the Soviet Union as a bulwark of anti-fascism and island of bliss. Walter Benjamin's historical-philosophical legacy, his “Theses on the Philosophy of History,” is one of the first theoretical reactions to this loss of utopia.

Rafał Wnuk
Between Scylla and Charybdis

The German and Soviet Occupation of Poland 1939–1941

The Hitler-Stalin pact is considered proof of the similarity between the totalitarian systems of National Socialism and Stalinism. A glance at the occupation policy in the territories of the Second Polish Republic allows a more differentiated judgement. The Nazis never concealed their intent to destroy the Polish state, to annihilate its elites, and to subjugate the remaining population. The Soviet Union by contrast tried to maintain a semblance of legitimacy and present the annexation of the Polish eastern territories as liberation. The Nazi terror was to have a paralyzing effect, while the Soviet terror was shrouded in silence.

Grzegorz Hryciuk

The Illusion of Freedom

The Soviet Occupation of Eastern Poland

Millions of Ukrainians and Belarusians lived in the eastern territories of the Polish Republic before the Second World War. Their social and economic situation was precarious, and after 1935, their national rights were increasingly curtailed. The invasion of the Soviet army on 17 September 1939 was met with goodwill, even enthusiasm. A wave of anti-Polish reprisals set in. Yet the hopes associated with the “liberators” were soon disappointed: Numerous Ukrainians and Belarusians fell into the clutches of the NKVD.

David Feest

Ethnic Division, National Consolidation

The Consequences of the Hitler-Stalin Pact in the Baltic

For the Baltic republics, the secret protocol of the Hitler-Stalin pact meant not only the end of their statehood. Its consequences caused a reorientation and radicalisation of self-perception among Lithuanians, Latvians, and Estonians. The efforts of the Soviet state to use terror to model the Baltic nations according to its own concept of order provoked resistance and created ethnic divisions within the Baltic societies. This was a necessary condition for the National Socialists' policies of annihilation, which after the occupation of the Baltic sought to link the local experience with Soviet terror to overall German goals. However, that experience also became an important factor of national consolidation.

Mariana Hausleitner

The Pact, Sovietisation, and the Consequences

Bessarabia and Northern Bukovina 1940–1941

In 1940, Romania was forced to cede Bessarabia and Northern Bukovina to the Soviet Union. Sovietisation immediately followed. It aimed to eliminate opponents and create the social basis for Communist rule. Large landholders were subjected to expropriation, middle-class peasants stigmatised as “kulaks” and deported to Siberia, members of the old elite arrested. Among the victims of Soviet policy were also thousands of Jews. After the German attack on the Soviet Union, the Jews fell victim to the Holocaust. All of this was taboo until 1989. Afterwards, calls were heard for the re-establishment of Greater Romania. In the meantime, a differentiated analysis has gained ground.

Viorica Olaru-Cemîrtan

Where the Trains Were in Mourning

Deportations in Bessarabia 1940-1941

The secret protocol of the Hitler-Stalin pact gave the Soviet Union free hand to annex Bessarabia and North Bukovina. With military occupation, Sovietisation and terror directed against the population got underway. Thousands were persecuted, arrested, and deported to Soviet camps.

Claudia Weber

Stalin's Trap

Katyn and the Allied Handling of War Crimes

In 1943, the Wehrmacht discovered the corpses of 15,000 Polish POWs who had been murdered by the NKVD in 1940. Nazi propaganda tried to capitalize on this. But this benefited the Soviet Union, which the Nazi regime held responsible for the murders. The Allies in the West knew the truth about the massacre, but did not want to play into the hands of the Nazis. The Allies kept silent, because they put a greater value on the maintenance of the anti-Hitler coalition. Even during the Nuremberg trials, they did not contest the Soviet assertions, because that would have called into question the entire allied policy of prosecuting war crimes.

Stefan Troebst

23 August 1939

A European Lieu de Mémoire?

The memory of the Hitler-Stalin pact differs throughout Europe. In Western Europe, it hardly exists, and in Germany it has faded. In East Central Europe, above all in Poland and the Baltic, the German-Soviet partition agreement is a central point of reference in remembrance culture. In Russia, Belarus, Ukraine, and Moldova, historians and the general public have difficulties with the secret protocol of the Treaty of Non-aggression. This gives rise to acute conflicts over memory with Warsaw, Vilnius, Riga, and Tallinn. 23 August 1939 is a date of fundamental importance for Europe, but it is not a European lieu de mémoire.

Tatiana Timofeeva

Putin: "For Better or for Worse, It's History"

Russia's Handling of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact

Soviet historiography justified the Soviet-German Treaty of Non-Aggression. The secret protocol was taboo. Only during Perestroika were the agreement and its secret protocol condemned. Since the rise of Vladimir Putin, official history policy in Russia has aimed at a positive presentation of the Soviet past. This includes a positive assessment of Stalinist foreign policy. The Soviet reading of the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact is once again riding high. But among the general public and historians, the topic remains controversial.

Marek Kornat
Ideology and Truth

The Hitler-Stalin Pact in Poland's Historical Memory

The Hitler-Stalin pact plays a pre-eminent role in Polish memory. This was not always the case. In the People's Republic of Poland, historians loyal to the party line spread the Soviet reading of the Treaty of Non-aggression as a smart move that laid the basis for victory in the war. For ideological reasons, the secret protocol was taboo. Today, Poles associate the pact with the experience of powerlessness vis-à-vis a conspiracy of partitioning powers and the feeling of being left in the lurch by allies.

Marcin Miodek

“That Is a New Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact!”

A Historical Analogy in the Polish Energy Debate

Historical analogies serve to polarise. If one takes them literally, they seem inappropriate. At the same time, they can point out parallels. In spring 2006, when Radek Sikorski, then the Polish defence minister, cast plans for the construction of the Baltic pipeline in the tradition of the Ribbentrop-Molotov pact, a storm of indignation broke out in Germany. The Polish media, for the most part, saw the matter more calmly. Even if the pipeline plans do not lead to a partition of Poland, the analogy has drawn attention to the fact that the project also has a political dimension.

Viktor Knoll

Leaving the Restricted Area

Sergei Sluch on Soviet Foreign Policy before 1941

For decades, it was impossible to handle the pre-history of the Great Patriotic War in the Soviet Union without ideological distortions. The secret protocol of the Hitler-Stalin pact was taboo. Only during Perestroika did a reassessment of Stalinist foreign policy get underway. Now a new study by Sergei Sluch achieves two things: It reconstructs the origins of the protocol, and it analyses the course and consequences of the argument among historians that developed in Russia over the motives that guided Stalin and the Soviet leadership in concluding this agreement with Nazi Germany.