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TRIALOGUE OF WWII HISTORY: HISTORIOGRAPHY, MEMORY, EDUCATION*

Dear organisers and colleagues! I would like to express my gratitude for the invitation and the possibility to speak to the audience of the young leaders from Germany, Poland and Russia. Referring to the title of our conference, I decided to entitle my speech “Trialogue of WWII history”. By this, I meant three interconnected elements, which largely help to constitute our understanding of the history of the Second World War and its lasting impact – historiography, memory and education.

Let me give you brief definitions of these elements. By “historiography”, I contemplate the professional scholarship about the events of 1939–1945, though there is a tendency to enlarge the chronological frame of the War and to begin the count from 1937, i.e. Japan’s aggression against China.¹ We can understand “memory”, our second element, as multiplicity of representations of the past made either by contemporaries of WWII or by future generations; the past, which after the works of the French sociologist Maurice Halbwachs, is often regarded as “not an objective given, but a collective reconstruction. It does not survive as such, but has constantly to be reconstructed anew, in accordance with its function for a given present”.² Finally, our third element is education given both at schools and at universities, which remains one of the important channels to reproduce and to transmit the dominant image or images of WWII history. According to the Russian sociologists who headed the large-scale national research held in 2004, a year before

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¹ See, for example: Mitter R., *Forgotten Ally: China’s World War II, 1937–1945* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2013), pp. 4–5.

² Assmann J., *Religion and Cultural Memory: Ten Studies*, transl by R. Livingstone (Stanford, Ca.: Stanford University Press, 2006), p. 93.

the sixtieth anniversary of the Victory, “the educational organisations where history is studied lay the foundations of the historical memory”.³

The relations in the triangle “historiography–memory–education” are not always harmonious and dialogue often does not go ideally. More so, each element itself, if to speak metaphorically, passes through internal struggles. Historiography having as an ideal academic objectivity and neutrality does not always correspond to it. If to consider the high political stakes linked to the “battles” over WWII history, the impact of politisation upon historical works is rather strong.⁴ The “external” pressure coexists with the internal challenges. If the War itself, transforming from European to global one, by December 1941 encompassed all the great powers of the world, the research of its history was often more narrow-minded and gave the priority to the national focuses and cases. According to one authoritative historian from the USA, “in most American universities, international history has gone the way of dinosaur. The surviving species of American diplomatic historian reports with monoarchival singularity, whether pro or con...”⁵ Obviously, this is not only an American problem, and many other national historiographies share it as well.

Memory, as historiography, remains open to different interpretations and conflicts; it goes through transformation not only because of the generations’ change, which is something inevitable, but also under the conscious impacts made on it by different social and political forces. Finally, the system of education (especially the primary and secondary ones) combining the “enlightenment” functions with many other aims, including the socialisation and the “growing up” of citizens, is subjected to the different influences also. For example, it should take into account the relevant scholarship on WWII, which, as a rule, depicts history of the War as complex and often contradictory, but in the same time, the education system reproduces the dominant and often simplified image of the Second World War. If the audience of the academic works remains rather restricted, schools however operate with the big numbers.

³ Afanas'eva L.I. and Merkushev V.I., “Velikaja Otechestvennaja vojna v istoricheskoi pamjati rossijan” [The Great Patriotic War in the historical memory of the Russian people], *Sociologicheskie issledovanija* [Sociological studies], 2005, no.5, s. 16.

⁴ See, for example, a scholar’s opinion in: Glantz D.M., “Stalin’s Strategic Intentions, 1941–1945: Soviet Military Operations as Indicators of Stalin’s Postwar Territorial Ambitions”, *The Journal of Slavic Military Studies*, 2014, vol. 27, no. 4, p. 704n66.

⁵ Schuker S.A., “Reflections on the Cold War”, *Diplomacy & Statecraft*, 2001, vol. 12, no. 4, p. 1.

In the main part of my speech, I would like to explore three above-mentioned elements of WWII history's "trialogue" and will try to present the contemporary discussions about the Second World War held as between the academics, as in the more broad social and political circles. This review, I hope, will give us some background to discuss the problems of educating about the history of WWII in Q & A session.

I will not try to give you in a few minutes more or less thorough review of the WWII historiography, vast in its sheer volume and continuing to expand. Going to nearly any large bookshop you could find the shelves full of the books about the Second World War. This obvious fact already tells us that the history of the tremendous events played out between 1939 and 1945 continues to catch the imagination and thoughts of many people around the globe. It is difficult to argue with the idea that "the two world wars are the mountain ranges that dominate the historical landscape of the twentieth century. We still live in their shadows, in America as well as in Europe".⁶

In some sense, historiography of WWII bears the signs of the War itself but, in the same time, it is difficult for scholars to cope with such heritage. Let me expand this idea in three steps.

Nowadays, historians have under their hand the vast complex of different sources concerning the history of WWII. The professionals in the field could almost undoubtedly say that they are more fully informed about the events of 1939–1945 than even the most high-ranked contemporaries, beginning with the "Big Three", leaders of the key powers of the anti-Hitlerite alliance. However, it doesn't mean that all the secrets of the War are disclosed. It is likely that some of them will stay as the enigmas, as, for example, deaths of the two political leaders, Prime Minister of the Polish government-in-exile, General Władysław Sikorski and the former Vichy Prime Minister, Admiral François Darlan. The first one crashed in the airplane near Gibraltar in July 1943, and Darlan, who switched sides in November 1942 and went to Allies, was killed in Algiers in a month by a member of the French Resistance presumably linked with Charles de Gaulle's organisation (there is also a hypothesis about possible British involvement in Darlan's death).⁷ According to one informed

⁶ Lukacs J., "The Coming of the Second World War", *Foreign Affairs*, 1989, vol. 68, no. 4, p. 165.

⁷ Reynolds D., *In Command of History: Churchill Fighting and Writing the Second World War* (London, 2004), p. 329.

opinion, “responsibility for the Darlan assassination remains one of the most intriguing unsolved crimes of World War II. In his memoirs, de Gaulle suggested obliquely, and without citing any evidence, that the United States was responsible but the truth will probably never be known”.⁸

Obviously, in their knowledge of the past historians depend on the sources and especially on the archival sources. The disclosure of the latter depends in a significant manner on the government’s policy in the field of the historical memory. In the USA and Great Britain, the vast majority of the documents concerning WWII are declassified and relatively easily accessible. As an example of the “white spot” which nevertheless existed for a long time in the British case, it is possible to name the archival documents throwing the light on the enigmatic episode, which “could have been one of the defining moments of the Second World War”.⁹ I mean the flight of Rudolf Hess, Hitler’s deputy in the Nazi party, to UK in May 1941, which gave origin to some speculations about the possible accommodation between Germany and Great Britain generally considered as unfounded by the nowadays scholars.

In Russia, the situation with access to some important archival documents is more difficult. Several blocks of sources, for example, the intelligence résumés that went to Stalin’s table or his telephone conversations with the military commanders on the spot remain classified.¹⁰ There are also difficulties with the access to the ciphered inward and outward telegrams that arrived and left the Embassies of the USSR in the foreign countries. The American and Canadian historian Michael J. Carley, who knows the Russian archives well, remarked one time: “It is not easy to study the history of Soviet foreign policy or Soviet relations with the West. Until the beginning of the 1990s the Soviet archives were closed tight. After the collapse and dismemberment of the Soviet Union in 1991, the archives gradually opened, but only partially. Sometimes papers were opened only to be closed again”. He compared the research in the archives of the Russian foreign ministry where there is no access to

⁸ Roll D.L., *The Hopkins Touch: Harry Hopkins and the Forging of the Alliance to Defeat Hitler* (New York, 2013), p. 238.

⁹ Alba C., “Rudolf Hess 'flew to Scotland to overthrow Churchill'”, *The Sunday Times*, 7 June 2020.

¹⁰ See the interview given by the Russian historian L. Maksimenkov on 8 May 2020 in: <https://meduza.io/episodes/2020/05/08/lichnyy-arhiv-stalina-i-ego-perepiska-s-generalami-kakie-esche-arhivnye-dokumenty-ostayutsya-zasekrechennymi-cto-oni-mogut-rasskazat-o-voyne> (here and after: accessed 18.12.2020).

inventories to “playing poker when asking archivists for files. Sometimes the files are rich, and you win, and sometimes not, and you lose”.¹¹

Nevertheless, it is fair to mention that along with the remaining difficulties of access, there are other tendencies which help historians to study the Soviet “angle” of WWII history. For example, I can mention the project realised in 2015 by the archives of the Russian foreign ministry and called “USSR and Allies”. It has significantly expanded the volume of the archival documents easily accessible to the historians of the international relations and Soviet foreign policy during the Second World War. Nearly 4000 archival files touching the different aspects of the making of the Soviet diplomacy and dynamics of the relations between the USSR, USA, UK and France were digitised and made available at the special Internet site.¹²

Thus, when I spoke about historiography, which bears the signs of the War itself, I meant the sources, the artifacts of the epoqe, and its lasting enigmas. But documents are inseparably linked to their interpretations. Contemporary scholars of WWII history are far away from the maxim coined by the XIXth century German historian Leopold von Ranke who appealed to write history “as it really was” or, if to use newer academic parlance, “to recreate the past that exists independently of the preconceptions and prejudices of the historian, and to achieve value-free, scientific certainty”.¹³

Not only archival and other sources matter, but interpretations mediated by different reasons as well. The “shadows” of the past, which are encapsulated in the sources, make their impact on the nowadays historians also through the opinions and estimates formulated by the decision-makers, political and military leaders, officials and other contemporaries of WWII. It is symptomatic that this impact manifests itself in two different cases, the Soviet and British ones.

¹¹ Carley M.J., *Silent Conflict: A Hidden History of Early Soviet-Western Relations* (Lanham, MD, 2014), p. xi.

¹² *SSSR i sojuzniki. Dokumenty Arhiva MID Rossii o vneshnej politike i diplomatii vedushhih derzhav antigitlerovskoj koalicii* [USSR and Allies. Documents from the archives of the Russian foreign ministry about the foreign policy and diplomacy of the anti-Hitlerite alliance], available at: URL: <http://agk.mid.ru/fonds/sovetsko-frantsuzskie-otnosheniya/>

¹³ Levy J.S., “Explaining Events and Developing Theories: History, Political Science, and the Analysis of International Relations”, in Elman C. and Elman M.F. (eds.), *Bridges and Boundaries: Historians, Political Scientists, and the Study of International Relations* (Cambridge, Mass., 2001), p. 51.

Stalin's estimates continue to influence in many ways even the contemporary Russian historiography of WWII.¹⁴ This influence has many origins and explanations. Stalin's ideas about crucial events of WWII, for example, about the "turning point" in the War, were made public in his speeches of the war-period and were fixed later in the famous brochure *Falsifiers of History* (1948). This version of history determined several key conclusions of the Soviet historiography, though the condemnation of Stalin's personality cult (1956) corrected some of them.

It is difficult to deny that there are much continuity between contemporary Russian historiography of WWII and the Soviet one; these continuities became more pronounced in 2000–2010s and replaced the desire to break and even to deny the past estimates and opinions which was evident in the 1990s. Obviously, such trend corresponded to the political imperatives of constructing some line of heritage between the Russian Federation and the previous "incarnations" of the Russian state, including the USSR. In the same time, there are "internal" (is we speak about historiography) reasons for that. Stalin's crimes and cruelty couldn't deny the perspicacity of some his thoughts and estimates made during the WWII, the latter often being heterogeneous and not so single-eyed as in *Falsifiers of History*. For example, there are plenty of examples when Stalin recognised, especially during the "honeymoons" of the "Grand Alliance" in 1943–1944, the contribution made by the USA and Great Britain in the struggle against the common enemy. For several times, he made precise and penetrating conclusions about different aspects of strategy and international relations of the War, conclusions that were appreciated by his Western interlocutors.¹⁵

Having no so unlimited power as Stalin, Churchill was able yet to influence the English-language historiography impressively. Churchill's "artillery of words"¹⁶ was far more numerous than Stalin one's and the British leader was the only one,

¹⁴ Kudrjashov S.V., "V poiskah istorii vojny" [In Search of history of the War], in Kudrjashov S.V (ed.), *Vestnik Arhiva Prezidenta Rossijskoj Federacii. Vojna: 1941–1945* [Review of the Russian Presidential Archives. War: 1941–1945] (Moscow, 2010), ss. 12–20.

¹⁵ See, for example, the citations from diaries of US Secretary of War Henry L. Stimson and Chief of the Imperial General Staff, Field marshal Alan Brooke containing their high appreciations of Stalin's diplomacy during the Tehran conference, in: Magadeev I.E., "Diplomatija Sovetskogo Sojuza na Tegeranskoj konferencii (28 nojabrja – 1 dekabrja 1943 g.)" [Soviet diplomacy during the Tehran conference (28 November – 1 December 1943)], in Torkunov A.V. and Naryshkin S.E. (eds.), *Velikaja Pobeda* [The Great Victory], vol. 13 (Moscow, 2015), ss. 306, 316.

¹⁶ Woods F., *Artillery of Words: The Writings of Sir Winston Churchill* (Barnsley, 1992).

belonging to the “Big Three”, who left the memoirs. His six-volume *The Second World War* written with the help of several assistants and published in 1948–1953, during the dangerous rise of the Cold War between former Allies, left the lasting impact on future scholars. For example, Churchill’s underestimation of Stalingrad battle of 1942–1943 and his desire to underline the British and imperial successes in the War continue to have echo in the nowadays literature. You can find numerous books trying to prove that it was the victory at El Alamein in 1942 that “turned the tide of the Second World War”.¹⁷ Writing in 2004, the British historian David Reynolds confirmed the judgment made by one scholar in 1969 about Churchill’s impact on historiography: “we still ‘move down the broad avenues which he drove through war’s confusion and complexity’”.¹⁸

Recent historiography is not only prolonging some important ideas made by the contemporaries, bearing the hallmarks of the past, but it is experiencing also some difficulties dealing with the war’s “heritage” which tends to be larger than our capabilities to cope with it. What I mean by that? One of the well-established characterisation of the Second World War relates this vast conflict to the type of the “total wars”, or, to speak more precisely, it defines WWII as the conflict which “approximated the ideal type” of the “total war” in the most degree: “By a significant margin, this was the most immense and costly war ever fought. If coastal waters are counted, its theaters of combat extended to every continent save Antarctica. It involved most of the sovereign states on the planet, the bulk of the world’s population, and the largest armed forces ever assembled. Well over seventy million human beings were mobilized for military service. This was the quintessential ‘deep war’”.¹⁹

The “total war”, if we continue to follow the path, is demanding the “total history”²⁰, though the most famous protagonist of the “total history” and not admirer of military and political history as well, the French historian Fernand Braudel, meant by this term something vaster and more extended even than the

¹⁷ Hammond B., *El Alamein: The Battle that Turned the Tide of the Second World War* (London, 2012).

¹⁸ Reynolds, *In Command of History*, p. xx.

¹⁹ Chickering R. and Förster S., “Are We There Yet? World War II and the Theory of Total War”, in Chickering R., Förster S. and Greiner B. (eds.), *A World at Total War: Global Conflict and the Politics of Destruction, 1937–1945* (Cambridge, 2005), p. 2.

²⁰ Neilson K., “Total War: Total History”, *Military Affairs*, 1987, vol. 51, no. 1, pp. 17–21.

history of two World Wars.²¹ The creation of “total” and “global” (and readable which is a great task as well) history of the WWII remains one of the challenges which faces contemporary historiography. As an ideal, such history should be based on multiple archives and should take into account the multiplicity of “faces” and dimensions of the Second World War ranging from the “grand strategy” to personal stories and subjective perceptions. Introducing the third volume of recent *The Cambridge History of the Second World War* (2015), its editors, Michael Geyer and Adam Thooze, underlined that “only a global history of the Second World War, and an economic, social and cultural history at that, would reveal how deeply disparate and unequal this war was – and how deeply this global war unsettled the peoples across the world. We have lived with the fallout of the Second World War ever since”.²² Facing the same challenge in the case of writing a history of the previous “big war”, the American historian Jay Winter proposed to base the analysis on the “transnational history” methodology. Such history “does not start with one state and move on to others, but takes multiple levels of historical experience as given, levels which are both below and above the national level”.²³

Along with scholar’s attempts to write “total”, “global” and “transnational” histories of the War, there is an understandable desire of the broad public to personalise the perception of the past. It manifests itself not only in the movies or in other artistic products, *Saving Private Ryan* (1998) being one of the famous examples, but also through leaning to the personal histories of WWII, either we speak about the upper echelons of power or about the private citizens.

To cite only one example, the reading and the interpretation of WWII history through the lens of interaction between the “Big Three” remains the well-trodden path of historiography promising, however, some new tracks if to search them with good lanterns, i.e. new documents and methods. History of the relationship between

²¹ See a summary of Braudel’s ideas about “total history” in: Lai Cheng-Chung, *Braudel’s Historiography Reconsidered* (Lanham, MD, 2004), p. 18–19.

²² Geyer M. and Thooze A., “Introduction to volume III”, in Geyer M. and Thooze A. (eds.), *The Cambridge History of the Second World War*, vol. 3 (Cambridge, 2015), p. 17. For other ambitious attempts to write “total” and “global” histories of WWII see, for example: Weinberg G.L., *A World at Arms: A Global History of World War II*, new ed. (Cambridge, 2010); Belousov L.S. and Manykin A.S. (eds.), *Vtoraja mirovaja vojna i transformacija mezhdunarodnyh otnoshenij: ot mnogopoljarnosti k bipoljarnomu miru* [Second World War and transformation of international relations: from multipolarity to bipolar world] (Moscow, 2020).

²³ Winter J., “General Introduction”, in Winter J. (ed.), *The Cambridge History of the First World War*, vol. 1 (Cambridge, 2014), p. 6.

Stalin, Roosevelt and Churchill, which fascinated many contemporaries becoming the first historians of the “Big Three”, continues to become the subject for numerous thought-provoking books.²⁴

Speaking about the “total” history of WWII on the one hand and the “personal” history, on the other, I don’t want to oppose them, but to emphasise the complexity of the Second World War and its interior dialectics. “Total” mobilisation for war neighboured with the great centralisation of power in the hands of state leaders. As Churchill said during the first meeting of the Tehran conference in November 1943, “this was the greatest concentration of power that the world had ever seen. In our hands; here is the possible certainty of shortening the war, the much greater certainty of victories, but the absolute certainty that we held the happy future of mankind”.²⁵ In this sense, personal relationship between Stalin, Roosevelt and Churchill obviously was more than personal, but, at several occasions, it manifested its human side as well. Recent profound researches of the correspondence between the three leaders demonstrated that it was not so “personal” as could be imagined being rather a “mirror” of the international relations during WWII.²⁶

Different forces coming from the past and present drive historiography, and this chronological duality shapes memory as well. Regarding into the past, memory is in the same time often influenced and transformed by present concerns and thoughts. Historiography tries to bring to the audience verified and “neutral” facts,

²⁴ See one of the early accounts written by a confidant of Harry Hopkins, Roosevelt’s *alter ego*, in: Sherwood R.E., Roosevelt and Hopkins: An Intimate History (New York, 1948). One of the classical works belongs to the American diplomat who acted as a senior advisor in the US War Department (1943–1947); see: Feis H., *Churchill, Roosevelt, Stalin. The War They Waged and the Peace They Sought* (Princeton, 1967). Among books that are more recent see: Pechatnov V.O., *Stalin, Ruzvel't, Trumjen: SSSR i SShA v 1940-h gg.* [Stalin, Roosevelt and Truman: USSR and USA in the 1940s.] (Moscow, 2006); Fenby J., *Alliance: the Inside Story of How Roosevelt, Stalin and Churchill Won One War and Began Another* (San Francisco, 2006); Butler S., *Roosevelt and Stalin: Portrait of a Partnership* (New York, 2015).

²⁵ First Plenary Meeting, November 28, 1943 (Bohlen Minutes), in *Foreign Relations of the United States, The Conferences at Cairo and Tehran 1943* (Washington, 1961), p. 487. See also: Record of Conversation between the Prime Minister and Marshal Stalin, November 28, 1943, in *The National Archives of Great Britain, Cabinet Office 66/45*, fol. 28.

²⁶ Pechatnov V.O. and Magadeev I.E., *Perepiska I.V. Stalina s F. Ruzvel'tom i U. Cherkhillem v gody Velikoj Otechestvennoj vojny. Dokumental'noe issledovanie* [Correspondence between I.V. Stalin, F. Roosevelt and W. Churchill during the Great Patriotic War. Documental research], vol. 1–2 (Moscow, 2015); Reynolds D. and Pechatnov V.O. (eds., with the assistance of I. Magadeyev and O. Kucherenko), *The Kremlin Letters : Stalin's Wartime Correspondence with Churchill and Roosevelt* (New Haven, Conn. and London, 2018).

but, even if we leave aside the internal problems of historical scholarship, there is, as a rule, the gaps between academic knowledge and memory. Here I will focus on the Russian case but we can compare it to the other cases, including the German and Polish ones, during the Q & A session.²⁷

Discussing the place that the Second World War and the Great Patriotic War, the latter being usually called the Soviet-German war in the English-language literature, occupied in the memory of the Russian society, I will use several sociological surveys. They give more or less comprehensive picture for three years (2004, 2013 and 2020) serving for us as the pits for further exploration. The first survey was conducted by the Sociological centre of the Russian Presidential Academy of National Economy and Public Administration, the second one – by the Russian Public Opinion Research Center (VTsIOM), the third one – by VTsIOM and Public Opinion Foundation (FOM).

The questions, which are in the centre of my further narrative, are as follows: 1) Does the history of WWII continue to inspire the interest of the broader public? 2) Does the image of the events of 1939–1945, as they are remembered, correspond to the scholars' interpretations of the War, or it is formed under other influences? 3) What circumstances do differentiate the memory of the War inside the Russian society?

The continuing growth of the historiography about WWII correlates with the high attention of the public paid to this theme. Asked in November 2004 about the events of the Great Patriotic War (1941–1945), more than half of the Russian respondents belonging to the different age groups answered that they are “very interested”, or “rather interested than not”. These two variants gained 64,7% of answers in the age group between 25 and 29 years (the lowest result), and 91,4% of answers giving by the respondents older than 60 years (the highest result).²⁸

This interest coexists with the emotional attachment to the history of the Great Patriotic War, which takes form, as a rule, of the proud and perception of the Victory as something that consolidates the Russian society. In June 2013, 96% of the students thought that they could be proud because of the deeds of the Red Army

²⁷ As an example how the different memories of same event could be analysed, see: Jahn P. (hrsg.), *Pamjat' o Stalingrade: Stalingrad v nemeckoj i rossijskoj pamjati / Stalingrad Erinnern. Stalingrad im deutschen und russischen Gedächtnis* (Berlin, 2003).

²⁸ Afanas'eva L.I. and Merkushev V.I., “Velikaja Otechestvennaja vojna v istoricheskoj pamjati rossijan”, p. 13.

and the Soviet people during 1941–1945.²⁹ In May 2020, the first feelings, which respondents associated with the Great Patriotic War, were pride and patriotism (39%), sense of victory (18%), tears, sadness and sorrow (13%), death of the relatives (11%), pain, mourning and grief (11%).³⁰

However, the general interest and particular emotions caused by the Great Patriotic War don't go hand in hand with the deep and exact knowledge of its history. The respondents have difficulties with some basic facts. In November 2004, the percentage of the right answers on the question "When did the Second World War begin?" varied from 38,6 to 49% depending on the age group. It is important to note that the people older 60 years, the group expressing the most vivid interest in WWII history, had the lowest result.³¹ Nearly 16 years after, the answers on the same question were better (for example, men and women between 18 and 24 years improved the score of the right answers from 43,9 to 54%)³², but nevertheless almost half of the respondents failed to identify the beginning of WWII. In June 2013, the same students, which felt proudly about the Great Patriotic War, had troubles with the naming of its key battles. Nearly 25% of the respondents didn't know about the Stalingrad battle. The situation with the Leningrad siege was even worse (46% didn't hear about it).³³

It was possible to anticipate the "gap" between the historiography and memory as concerned the knowledge of the facts. But in the realm of interpretations there are some peculiar similarities. There is a tendency of the broad public, for example, to see the history of WWII through the images of the leading personalities, known and unknown heroes, a tendency, generally speaking, to personalise the War. It is not uncommon, as we've seen to the historiography, but it contradicts in many ways the idea and the realities of the "total war". The image of WWII to remain

²⁹ Novoselova E., "Rossijskie studenty ne pomnjat geroev VOV" [Russian students don't remember the heroes of the Great Patriotic War], *Rossijskaja gazeta*, 19 June 2013, mode of access: <https://rg.ru/2013/06/19/pamyat-site.html>

³⁰ "Pamjat' o vojne: Kak v rossijskikh sem'jah hranjat pamjat' o vojne?" [Memory of war: how the Russian families keep the memory of war?], *FOM*, 20 May 2020, mode of access: <https://fom.ru/Proshloe/14396>

³¹ Afanas'eva L.I. and Merkushev V.I., "Velikaja Otechestvennaja vojna v istoricheskoj pamjati rossijan", p. 15.

³² "Jeksperty Vyshki: Velikaja otechestvennaja vojna dlja rossijan zaslonjaet Vtoruju mirovuju" [The experts of the Higher school of economics: the Great Patriotic War overshadows the Second World War for the Russian society], *Higher school of economics*, 10 September 2020, mode of access: <https://www.hse.ru/news/expertise/397858420.html>

³³ Novoselova E., "Rossijskie studenty ne pomnjat geroev VOV".

“readable” and comprehensive, to be perceived not as something abstract and “hollow” but causing the emotions and feelings, often needs to be personalised.

This process touches many levels of people’s perception. Among the factors that contributed to the Victory, the respondents, according to survey of November 2004, tended to underline those ones that had personal and human dimensions, as, for example, patriotism and heroism at the battlefront and in the rear (ranged as the two decisive factors by different age cohorts), hatred of fascism. They outrun heavily economics and strategic factors, as, for example, the vast territory of the USSR or its hard climate. Assessing the role played by the leaders of the “Grand Alliance”, the respondents put emphasis on the personality of Stalin whose impact was characterised as the “decisive” by 37% of people between 25 and 29 years (the lowest result) and by 66,7% of people older than 60 years (the highest result).³⁴ The personalities of the famous Soviet marshals and generals beginning with Georgy K. Zhukov, heroes from the armed forces or partisans (as, for example, Zoya A. Kosmodemyanskaya) are the reference points for the Russian memory of the War as well.³⁵

This personalisation of memory and perception of the past has many roots. The interest to the Great Patriotic War and the feelings, which surrounded it, are often based on the perception of family links with the grandiose events of 1941–1945. In May 2020, 88% of all respondents said that they had or have relatives who participated in the War.³⁶ The same number, according to men and women older than 60 years asked in April 2020, reached 94%.³⁷ The memory shares with the historiography a desire to have a comprehensive image of the War; a desire, in some sense, to translate its “unnatural” and “inhuman” dimensions into some narrative that would provoke empathy and understanding. This narrative could acknowledge the horrors of the War but should make the Victory not only a sort of the “redemption”, but also a part of the story understandable to each human being. It is almost impossible even to imagine, for example, the scale of human losses during

³⁴ Afanas'eva L.I. and Merkushev V.I., “Velikaja Otechestvennaja vojna v istoricheskoj pamjati rossijan”, p. 18.

³⁵ Novoselova E., “Rossijskie studenty ne pomnjat geroev VOV”.

³⁶ “Pamjat' o vojne: Kak v rossijskih sem'jah hranjat pamjat' o vojne?”.

³⁷ Voroncova K., “Rossijane podderzhivajut mery po sohraneniu pamjati o Velikoj Otechestvennoj vojne” [The Russian people support the measures to conserve the memory about the Great Patriotic War], *Rossijskaja gazeta*, 29 April 2020, mode of access: <https://rg.ru/2020/04/29/rossiiane-podderzhivaiut-mery-po-sohraneniu-pamjati-o-velikoj-otechestvennoj-vojne.html>

the War, 27 million of the Soviet people or approximately 6 million Jews killed during the Holocaust and many other horrible facts, which tend to transform only in “numbers” if not to add to them the personal dimension.

The veterans of the War epitomised this personal side of the past conflict. In many cases, they were and are the symbolic and real barometer of the “truth” about the War, this “truth” being sometimes an important field of competition and struggle for more freedom of speech and expression in the USSR even in the Stalin times. So-called “lieutenant prose”, a number of novels written by the Soviet veterans of WWII (often junior officers of the Red Army) and published in 1940–1960s, tried to correct a simple image of the heroic struggle. “Lieutenants” were eager to show another “face” of the War, and their prose was, according to one scholar, a “scream of memory”.³⁸

Nevertheless, it is only a part of the story. As historiography, memory tends in many ways to reproduce the dominant images propagated by the authoritative contemporaries and, if we speak about the Russian case, images produced by the Soviet leadership during WWII. These images, to be persistent, should correspond to the realities but in the same time, they immortalise the political logic and interests of historical actors. The basic divide and sometimes confusion in the popular mind between the beginnings of the Second World War (September 1939) and the Great Patriotic War (June 1941), obviously, tells us about the radical “rupture” in the destiny of the Soviet People after the start of “Barbarossa”. Speaking more generally, we can discern here the effects of the national focus on the events of the War, a tendency known in many countries. But in the same time this vision of WWII chronology reflects the perspective of the Soviet authorities themselves who opposed the period between 1939 and 1941 characterised as an “imperialistic war” and marked by the tight collaboration between USSR and Germany to the Great Patriotic War when the Soviet Union and the Third Reich became mortal enemies. According to the Russian historian Oleg V. Budnickij, the Great Patriotic War overshadows WWII in the perceptions of the Russian society.³⁹

Even the different dates of the Victory – 8 May in the Western countries where it is called Victory in Europe Day and 9 May in USSR/Russia and some other

³⁸ Korovin V.I. (ed.), *Istorija russkoj literatury XX – nachala XXI veka* [History of the Russian literature, XX – beginning of XXI centuries], pt. 2 (Moscow, 2014), s. 1549.

³⁹ “Jeksperty Vyshki: Velikaja otechestvennaja vojna dlja rossijan zaslonjaet Vtoruju mirovuju”.

countries – bear the signs of the early struggle between the Allies for being called the main contributor to the Victory. Stalin, Truman and Churchill failed to agree on the common date of announcement of the Victory over Germany. The signing of the unconditional surrender by the representatives of Nazi Germany took place twice: on 7 May, in Reims where the headquarters of the Western Allies were stationed and on 9 May, in Berlin, recently taken by the Red Army after the bloody struggle. Each side wanted to emphasise its own contribution to the defeat of the Third Reich.⁴⁰

Thus, this brief analysis of WWII memory based on the Russian case has shown the multi-dimensional ambivalence of this memory. The pronounced and expressed interest in the history of Great Patriotic War, which overshadowed those of the Second World War, often, coexists with rather feeble knowledge of its basic facts and events. The memory combines the feelings of legitimate pride caused by the Victory and gratitude to the veterans who saved the country and the people from the Nazi yoke with the more silenced appreciation of the horrors and sufferings of the War. In May 2020, 37% of the respondents who have or had veterans of the War as relatives answered that the latter didn't like to speak about their experience on the battlefronts.⁴¹ This ambivalence of memory in many cases could be conceptualised as the coexistence, sometimes taken the conflictual form, between the "façade" and the "backstage", if to employ the terms of the American sociologist Erving Goffmann.⁴² The contradictions between the official discourse of the Soviet authorities and "lieutenant prose" epitomised this contradiction as well.

Obviously, the memory of WWII is influenced also by the political events of the different epochs. The memorialisation of the War went hand in hand with its politisation in one or another direction. It was evident already in the Soviet epoch. The only military parade on the Red square in the honor of Victory, which took place in the Stalin times, was the parade of 24 June 1945. Stalin wasn't interested in promoting the military heroes of the War too much fearing the eventual growth of the Army's influence inside the Soviet hierarchy of power. It took nearly two decades to see the second parade held on 9 May 1965, during the first years of Brezhnev epoch, and the following pause lasted 20 years as well. The frequency of the parades

⁴⁰ Pechatnov and Magadeev, *Perepiska*, vol. 2, pp. 590–599.

⁴¹ "Pamjat' o vojne: Kak v rossijskikh sem'jah hranjat pamjat' o vojne?".

⁴² Goffman E., *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (New York, 1959).

grew only in the times of the Russian Federation. According to the law of 19 May 1995, they are held annually. From 2008, this year being marked by the growing use of the newest military equipment during the parades (air forces, armour, etc.), their function as a demonstration of the Russian power became more pronounced.⁴³

A conclusion made by David Reynolds who analysed the “long shadow” of the First World War works if to apply it to the second conflict as well: as the “direct material impacts” of the events of WWII diminished, “the cult of memory did become more important, but remembrance was constantly shaped by contemporary concerns...”.⁴⁴ For example, growing international contradictions between Russia and the Western countries manifested themselves in some fluctuations of memory. From 2009 to 2020, the percent of the Russian respondents thinking that Poland was an enemy of the USSR during WWII increased from 3 to 11%, and only 5% of the answers indicated Poland as an Ally.⁴⁵

My concluding part, which deals with the third element of “trialogue”, the education, will be the shortest and, I think, the most subjective one. Here I rely more than in the previous paragraphs on my personal experience. Continuing to draw the main line of my speech, I would like to put the third element of trialogue, the education, in the same position between two poles, the past and the present.

Knowledges given in the schools and universities remained in 2004 the most important source of information about the WWII for the Russian public. They were cited as such by all age groups of the respondents, except the men and women older than 60 years, the latter being the post-war generation for whom the stories told by parents and friends played the most significant role.⁴⁶ For sure, Internet and other media instruments compete with the information transmitted through the traditional channels of the education, but the latter nevertheless conserves its obvious importance and continues to influence the national memory about the War.

⁴³ Istorija paradov Pobedy na Krasnoj ploshhadi [History of Victory parades held on the Red square], TASS, 16 April 2020, mode of access: <https://tass.ru/info/8263547>. See mode details in: Tumarkin N., *The Living and the Dead: the Rise and Fall of the Cult of World War II in Russia* (New York, 1994).

⁴⁴ Reynolds D., *The Long Shadow: The Legacies of the Great War in the Twentieth Century* (New York, 2014), p. xxii.

⁴⁵ “Jeksperty Vyshki: Velikaja otechestvennaja vojna dlja rossijan zaslonjaet Vtoruju mirovuju”.

⁴⁶ Afanas'eva L.I. and Merkushev V.I., “Velikaja Otechestvennaja vojna v istoricheskij pamjat' rossijan”, p. 16.

It became common and often fair to speak about the different problems in the educational system. Though there are plenty of deficiencies linked to the system of the standardised exams, which stimulates more some sort of drill in facts and dates and not the capability to reason, it gives some hard results as well. For example, in September 2020 answering the question about the date when WWII started, the schoolchildren and students were the best category of the respondents gaining 71% percent of right answers. That number was far better than those one gained by the average respondent from Moscow (47%).⁴⁷

Nevertheless, the “white spots” of education obviously exist and tend to confuse or even falsify the memory. In April 2015, visiting one the symposiums dedicated to the anniversary of the Second World War, which took place in Washington, D.C, I heard an interesting, though no encouraging remark made by the Professor of the American University Peter Kuznick. After asking his students one time to define the US and Soviet death toll in WWII, he heard astonishing answers: around 900 000 people from the American side and nearly 100 000 from the Soviet.⁴⁸ These numbers witnessed the absence of any idea about of the real cruelty of WWII and its significance for countries involved.

Some distortions of memory are linked not only to the problems to acquire and to master the knowledge but also to the deficiencies in the organisation of the education system itself. One of the contributing factor to the persistent confusion in the Russian society between the Second World War and the Great Patriotic War is continuing reduction of hours dedicated to the world history. If to take into account that the state exam after the school emphasised the Russian history, it becomes almost “rational” to pupils not to pay a lot of attention to the history of other countries, which is studied fragmentary and sketchy. Moreover, the growing “pressure” of the contemporary events threatens also to diminish the part of the

⁴⁷ “Jeksperty Vyshki: Velikaja otechestvennaja vojna dlja rossijan zaslonjaet Vtoruju mirovuju”.

⁴⁸ See also: Shitov A., “Simpozium ko Dnju Pobedy sostojalsja v Vashingtone” [Symposium dedicated to the Victory Day took place in Washington], *TASS*, 12 April 2015, mode of access: <https://tass.ru/mezhdunarodnaya-panorama/1896139>.

courses dedicated to WWII (I put aside the question, is it right or not).⁴⁹ The same holds in regard of the historiography.⁵⁰

The trends of so-called “Bologna process” add difficulties to the reconstruction of integral picture of WWII in the students’ mind. This “process” put accent on the special courses highlighting some peculiar topics or problems and not to the general courses, which presumably (though not always) give the more comprehensive and more encompassing picture.

Finally, it would be over hastily to forget about the growing discrepancy between the past and the present. Our three countries, as many others in the so-called “developed” world, didn’t know the major wars after 1945 and many youth people (especially in the Western states) didn’t have any military experience. For many of us it could seem war and warfare is something, which we see at the TV or in our computers than the real deaths, destruction and horrors. This circumstance, which if obviously favorable (I don’t mind to promote “enthusiasm” for war), threatens nevertheless to distort our perceptions of the past and the present, the latter being far more cruel if we regard it from the “hot spots” of the planet. It threatens also to erode some barriers to the international conflicts. It is hard to agree totally with the famous thesis about “the essential irrelevance of nuclear weapons”, put forward by the American political scientist John Mueller, but this scholar justly reminds us of the role played by the memory of WWII during the post-war decades. He wrote: “A nuclear war would certainly be vastly destructive, but for the most part nuclear weapons simply compound and dramatize a military reality that by 1945 had already become appalling. Few with the experience of World War II behind them would contemplate its repetition with anything than horror”.⁵¹ It is important to keep in mind this dreadful lesson of the past.

Therefore, we are finishing this brief tour over the vast “triangle” of WWII history; the tour, which may seem not so brief for some of you. Historiography, memory and education are not separate parts of our understanding of the Second World War; they interact and influence each other inside the peculiar “trialogue”.

⁴⁹ Belousov L.S., “Kak prepodavat' novuju i novejšuju istorii v universitete?” [How to teach new and contemporary history in the University?], *Novaja i novejšaja istorija* [New and contemporary history], 2009, no. 1, s. 149.

⁵⁰ Adamthwaite A., “War Origins Again”, *The Journal of Modern History*, 1984, vol. 56, no. 1, p. 114.

⁵¹ Mueller J., “The Essential Irrelevance of Nuclear Weapons: Stability in the Postwar World”, *International Security*, 1988, vol. 13, no. 2, p. 57.

Historiography, memory and education are not hermetically encapsulated in the past being subjected to the constant impact of the present, the latter making WWII further away from us. However, in the same time, the present re-actualizes the history of WWII and transforms it either in a weapon of the ideological struggle, or in a factor that unites peoples and countries who keep in mind their experiences of being Allies or even enemies trying to learn “lessons” of the past. Thank you for your attention.