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## European Regional Conflicts of the Second Half of the 1930s and the Evolution of the National-Socialist Image of Enemy

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### Abstract

Regional conflicts in West and Central Europe, in the second half of the 1930s symbolized the collapse of the Versailles system, polarizing the situation and affecting the balance of power on the continent. All of them had international aspects, including propaganda aspect. European regional conflicts (1936-1939) have become a convenient case for approbation of the "old" Nazi ideological postulates as well as for development of "new" ones. The result of such propaganda work was the formation of an "enemy image", actively used in the future on the fronts of World War II. The article deals with the design and implementation by the Nazis in the German and European environment proper of the image of an "external" enemy, on example of the introduction of Hitler troops into the Rhine zone (1936), the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939), the Anschluss of Austria (1938) and Munich conference (1938).

**Keywords:** Nazism, the image of enemy, the propaganda war, Introduction of Hitler troops into the Rhine zone (1936), Anschluss of Austria (1938), the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939), Munich conference (1938).

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## Introduction

European regional conflicts of 1936-1939 from the point of view of propaganda installations, can be conditionally divided into two groups. The first one is - "ethnic foci" (the Rhineland, Austria, Czechoslovakia), the second - "ideological foci" (Civil War in Spain). Ethnic conflicts undoubtedly contained not only a national, but also an ideological component, but the leading role was played by the national component in them. This component also found its expression in the propaganda play on nationalistic feelings and motives.

The image of the external enemy of Nazi Germany was based on a psycho-emotional component that relied on the mass market. At the same time, according to "Mein Kampf", the scientific and intellectual components have been minimized [1]. It had results in simplification of the process of informational processing of the population by the introduction of ready stereotyped images into the mass consciousness. Empowering the image of external enemy in the Third Reich by a complex of simplified and negative stereotypes has become one of the features of its creation [2].

## Material and Methods

Source base of the article includes materials of 4 funds of the Archive of foreign policy of the Russian Federation, secret and unclassified funds and 1 fund of the Russian State Military Archive.

Studying the documents of the NSDAP, speeches of the Nazi leader makes it possible to trace the main directions of Nazi foreign policy propaganda and its evolution in connection with the regional conflicts of 1936-1939.

The conclusions are also based on analysis of extreme Nazi and German state Newspapers, 1936-1939 – *Angriff*, *Völkischer Beobachter*, *Deutsche Allgemeine Zeitung*, *Berliner Tageblatt*, *Frankfurter Zeitung*, *Berliner Börsen Courier*, etc. The qualitative analysis of 10 newspaper material allowed studying forms and methods of Nazi forming the image of the enemy on this base.

The methodological basis of the research is the principle of historicism, involving the consideration of the problem in all its diversity, in the context of concrete historical conditions, taking into account its dynamic relationship with other historical phenomena and processes and requiring systematic processing of historical sources and literature. The principle of scientific objectivity has also been adopted. The activity of the Nazi propaganda apparatus on the formation of the image of the enemy is studied in the context of the development of the Third Reich, and the evolution of its external tasks.

Such research methods as the method of historical description, problem-chronological, analysis and synthesis were used in the work. The objectives of the research led to an appeal to interdisciplinary sciences (geopolitics, world politics, political propaganda). Historical and systematic method led it possible to consider the organization and formation of Nazi foreign policy propaganda in the general complex of Third Reich's propaganda activities on the eve of World War II. The historical-comparative method allowed, on the examples of several European regional conflicts, the end of 1930's to reveal the general tendencies and specific directions of propaganda support of the foreign policy of Nazi Germany in 1936-1939.

## Discussion

The transformation of a political enemy image in Nazi propaganda will be studied on the example of the European regional conflicts, 1936-1939. This image was exploited quite actively during the information preparation for the remilitarization of the Rhine zone and was most often represented by anti-French and anti-communist trends. The French-Soviet Pact (1935) was a convenient excuse for such manipulations of

the European public opinion. Printed Nazi propaganda actively exaggerated on this issue the thesis that France "since the time of Versailles tried to keep Germany in chains on the European continent" [3].

In this context, the French responsibility for the global (European) consequences of the Franco-Soviet pact was emphasized, since after its signing the Germans began to represent France as a "state oriented toward Bolshevism" and they considered their task "to protect Europe" from similar danger. By directing the main edge of the blow to France, the German propagandists tried to touch upon the USSR only indirectly, preferred to write about the Comintern, stressing less, than earlier its identity with the Soviet state [4].

However, just before the remilitarization of the Rhineland, German propaganda began to represent the USSR much more sharply, actively emphasizing the aggressiveness of its intentions [5]. The image of the USSR as the enemy of Nazi Germany (winter-spring of 1936) was most clearly represented in the oral speeches of the leaders of the Reich. At the same time, the opposition "depriving the communist dictatorship", "full hatred of the international communist threat", "the destructive concept of the chaos of the Bolshevik revolution", the "Asian destructive worldview" and the "peacefulness of the Germans" and their fear for the whole of Europe was actively used [6]. The positive image of Germany was also supplemented by demonstrating such "own" qualities as courage, honor, etc. [7].

In general, in the advocacy of the Rhine adventure, the image of a political enemy was not fully developed. The process of developing and filling the image of the external enemy in the Austrian direction by the National-Socialists was more "successful." An important feature of the propaganda design of the enemy's image in connection with the preparation of the Anschluss of Austria (until 1936) was its very amorphous character, based on the destabilizing component. The clearer image of the "wrecker" in Austria was used by the Germans from the beginning of 1936 and included not only the USSR, but also the concept of the "Austrian Republic", the "Treaty of Versailles" and Chancellor Schuschnig "not wishing to establish order in the state." With regard to the Austrian government, German propaganda has focused on the declaration of such qualities as corruption, political, economic, military weakness, etc. [8]. The image of the USSR was used to intimidate the Austrian public from time to time, systematically it began to be applied only from January 1938 (in the Austrian direction proper). It was endowed with such qualities as cruelty, aggressiveness, disintegration [9]. It was the tendency of merging (against Soviet Russia) into a single image of the three components - racial/national, ideological and political ones, for example, in the programmatic speeches of Nazi leaders (1938), phrases such as "Jewish, Bolshevik International," "Jewish-international communism" were actively used [10].

In general, the campaign in the press was "peaceful" with respect to the Austrians for some time, the negative role of the "reds", the "unhappy" situation of the population (before the Anschluss), which could not organize resistance, was underlined the role of Germany as "the savior of Austria". However, before the Anschluss the Nazi propaganda attempted to create the image of Austria as a "decaying" country that had come to such a state as a result of "the machinations of the Bolsheviks and the Czechs". Germany stated that it was no longer able to "carry the Germans' killings by the Germans" [11]. Reports from Austria were titled as "Bolshevik chaos that threatened the independence and the autonomy of Austria" [12], "The Bolshevik provocations", "The Shushnig-Stalin alliance", also about the grievances to German subjects in Austria [13]. Hitler, justifying future actions in Austria, In February 1938, on the eve of the Anschluss stressed: "Those who denies the mission of the people, is enemy of the people" [14].

In parallel, the anti-Soviet campaign was resumed in the German press. It was stressing that "Czechoslovakia is the bulwark of Bolshevism". This motive was present earlier in the propaganda of the Reich, but from the beginning of June it was given a special scope. According to the representation of the USSR in Berlin, the occasion of it was the opening of the Soviet exhibition in Prague [15]. Henlein and his party members also supported the anti-Soviet vector, spreading to Czechoslovakia the opinion that there

was too much cooperation between Prague and Moscow: "The Czech pupils quickly learned from their Moscow teachers how to use various kinds of propaganda treatment of the broad masses of the people" [16].

According to the German news Bureau (Berlin, 11 June 1938), received from a special correspondent of the *Berliner Tageblatt* in June 1938, because of the fact that "the Czech police was the most geeky way equipping its civilian population, so the tension increased in the region". Special correspondent wrote: "According to informed sources, the Czech officials, civil servants and members of the border unions have armed heavily with weapons in recent days. Police gave the Czechs permission for the free possession of weapons. More often in recent days threats of St. Bartholomew were proclaimed by Czech agents provocateurs, a constant threat emanating from an unoccupied, cheeky soldier became more and more depressing for the Germans in the border areas. Yesterday, for example, Sudeten Germans were shouted at the peacefully marching as if the Soviet star was ruled here, not the swastika" [17].

An analysis of the Press of the Third Reich in June-August (1938) allows to conclude that German journalists scrupulously and critically commented on, more precisely, criticized the activities of the Czechoslovak government. So almost every event that took place in Czechoslovakia was painted on the pages of Nazi newspapers in gloomy tones. The press was full of headlines about "the monstrous atrocities of the Czechs", "bloody terror", "hate hatred by the Czechs", "Czech imperialism", "border violations by Czech planes", "dirty government affairs" against Sudeten Germans, their plight in the Sudetenland region was stressed [18].

At the same time, in connection with the claims about the famine and distress, German journalists used the dramatization to back up the articles with "physical evidence" in the form of photographs [19].

In September 1938, German propaganda began actively use one of the main classical components of the "enemy image" – demonization - against the Czechoslovak state. For example, Czechoslovakia has been declared "the Czech with the horsemen of the Apocalypse" [20].

On September 12, after Hitler's another speech about 6,000 fans of Henlein have gone through the underworld streets of Karlsbad, with a swastika on their sleeves, shouting: "Down with the Czechs and the Jews!" The processions played a dual role - intimidation and demonstration of power, imposing on the average person the idea of the reliability of the defender in the face of the Nazis. The enemy was presented as an embodiment of treachery. After the imposition of such parcels, the thesis that only "civilized nations of Europe" can oppose such "barbarism" was again repeated. At the head of the struggle against such an enemy, national-socialist Germany should stand [21].

These accents were intensified by replicating such word combinations as "Hussite killers", "dark medieval regime", "terrible atrocities", "murderers of Germans", "hunger and torments of Sudeten Germans" and other similar ones that were dazzling both in the texts of newspaper notes and in the headlines.

The Fuhrer, arguing his policy in Czechoslovakia, appealed to the fact that his power in Germany rested on the absolute trust of the nation, whose interests he was obligated to protect. He could not fail to act in this situation, because he would break his promises, which he has given to the German people: in one way or another, to save the people from the ills caused by the Treaty of Versailles. To achieve this goal, he has received the German people's authority. Soon, as is known, the fate of Sudetenland has been decided by the Munich Conference (September 1938). Not the least role in the compliant policy of European countries in the Czechoslovak issue would be played by the image of the enemy formed in its context by Nazi propaganda.

The Spanish Civil War, 1936-1939 became a convenient occasion for strengthening anti-communist, anti-Soviet propaganda. On this basis, the image of the enemy - the Comintern -, the International brigades, the

Soviet Union, was quickly formed and supplemented. They, according to the Nazi propaganda, were responsible for the violence in Spain [22]. The newspapers had a lot of materials about the Republicans' cruelty ("from the Soviet's submission"): "Red danger," "The Kremlin is arming for the last fight," "The Soviet Union is under arms," "Moscow-Madrid," "Moscow Non-intervention," "World danger," "Moscow offensive," "Red general offensive". Immediately there were antitheses: "Friends of the World," "Germany wants peace, and Moscow wants war!" The anti-Soviet context of the image of the enemy with the development of the Spanish events became more and more visible and recognizable at the level of mass consciousness: "The Soviet ship have fired at Ceuta," "The Bolsheviks' intervention in the internal affairs of Spain," "The Moscow radio station calls on the Spanish Communists to fight for the power of the Soviets". The globalization of the problem also was a convenient device for propaganda: "Europe must take action against the Red danger," "All cultural nations must unite to organize a rebuff of the world's Bolshevik danger," "Everyone must rally to protect against the Red danger," etc. [23]. The foreshortening of the perception of events was being shifted: the military actions in Spain were treated not as a civil war (albeit with foreign participation), but as the struggle of communism with "European nationalism" and hardly Europe in general (hyperbolization of the problem) [24].

To impart "objectivity", the Nazi press criticized the policy of European states towards Spain. The role of Germany was unambiguous - it "at least did everything possible to stop attempts to strengthen Moscow's position in Spain". By the same algorithm and stereotype, as well as later in the Czechoslovak question, the positive image of the "Germany as savior" was presented: "Today Germany is an inviolable fortress of peace and order against Moscow" [25].

## Results

Thus, the image of the enemy in the Nazi propaganda based on regional conflicts of the second half of the 1930s was created and maintained with the help of such methods (techniques) as a methodical and systematic instigation of fear, intimidation by a potential enemy on this basis, terror as a means of instilling and again intimidating (for example, organization of sabotage in Austria and Czechoslovakia).

National Socialist propaganda used the tactics of contrasts and polarity in the presentation of the material: its - strangers, friends - enemies, sincere Nazis - cowardly socialists, etc. in creating the image of external enemy. The success of this direction was provided by the organization of ideological sabotage, the spread of ideological myths and the specific event fabrications, provocations, manipulation, intimidation, promises, falsifications, lies, demagoguery, etc. Chosen by the Nazis the method of forming and manipulating by public opinion answered the purposes of providing and realization of German expansionist plans through calls for the liberation of "natural Germans", a general struggle against communism and the creation of false images.

Nazi propagandists were among the first (in a massive order) to test the tactics of contrasts: "we are they; his - a stranger; friend is an enemy". It followed that "they» were always "strangers", and "strangers" were always "enemies". Information base of Nazi propaganda in regional conflicts of the 1930s was realized also through the use of such techniques.

Nazi propaganda in the present European conflict used for the most part, the "active, attacking" image of the enemy, emphasizing the aggressiveness of its intentions. To create such image the standard scheme of filling it with negative qualities such as violence, immorality, cruelty, misery, deceit, etc. was used. Because the leading role of the psycho-emotional component, Nazi propagandists have resorted to the extremely hypertrophied submission of the enemy. The effectiveness of such a constructed "enemy image" in the information space provided by the technique of opposition.

Nazi propaganda used variations of the enemy's image in the Rhine, Spanish, Austrian and Czechoslovak German foreign policy directions with varying degrees of intensity. For example, under informational support the Spanish policy vector by Reich, the image of a political enemy (the USSR, France) was brought to the fore and only the "racial" component played a supporting role. And in the decision of the Sudeten question by the German leadership, there was an almost equal value use of image of the national (Czechs = Slavs) and political enemy (the USSR, France).

The depth and degree of development of the content components of the image of the enemy in the Nazi ideology depended directly on such factors as the degree of internationalization and confrontation of the conflict, the correlation and alignment of forces, etc. Accordingly, in the Rhine adventure (too short in time for its propagandistic preparation and implementation) there was no clear tendency to create an integral image of the enemy that could be exploited in the conflict. In Spanish Civil War, on the contrary, as a result of its protracted nature, the sharpest form of confrontation and the profound degree of internationalization of the conflict, the Nazi propaganda has built up a rather slender and detailed image of the enemy, which had clear features and signs of the image of the "subhuman".

### **Conclusion**

The aggravation of the contradictions generated by the Versailles system, which took the form of a crisis in the mid-1930s, provided the basis for transforming the content components of the enemy's image. Propaganda support for foreign policy tasks of Hitler's Germany was realizing, including through the formation of public opinion. Subsequently, it has become an essential instrument of political control. The Nazi press has become one of the most convenient and widespread versions of the Reich propaganda, popularizing and disseminating official view on the events, forming a common (unified) attitude towards foreign policy events, supporting governmental measures, etc.

The image of the enemy (external and internal) in Nazi Germany was not static, because not a "complex", single image dominated at different stages and in different European conflicts, but only some of its components. The basis for folding the image of the "external" enemy of Nazi Germany was the emotional and psychological component that relied on the mass consumer. German propaganda not only created, demonized, but also tested "stereotyped" images that facilitate further information processing of the population (Czechs are enemies of Sudeten Germans, Communists - Germans and all Europe, etc.). The external enemy in the Third Reich was endowed with a set of simplified, negative stereotypes. Manipulation by public opinion with the aim of ensuring the implementation of German expansionist plans through the creation of false images, calls for the liberation of "natural Germans" and the general struggle against communism turned out to be quite effective.

In the European regional conflicts under consideration, the image of the external political enemy was used most actively and effectively at their final stage. It was necessary to fight with the "external enemy" including, by various means. Scheme: "find the enemy → the pursuit of the enemy → its complete destruction" reflected the idea of action with different shades. Such manipulation of public opinion provided the Nazi leadership with "worthy" excuses for introducing of necessary ideas "action" to the masses. Intervention by the Reich in European regional conflicts to achieve its goals seemed very "justified" in this context.

By 1939, the image of Germany's external enemy had evolved from simple personal content to the official propaganda that was very important in the eve the world war.

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