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Czechoslovakia in the Context of Nestor Makhno's Exile (1922–1924)

Jakub Frynta

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7 September 2023

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As the Embassy learned after the fact, the suicide attempt failed and Makhno remained alive. Jealousy of his wife for having an affair with his adjutant is also given as a reason.

Chargé d'Affaires a.i.

AMZV. F. II. sekce 1918-39 – JMENNÁ SPISOVNA. K.Č. 45. Spis č.j. 079265/II/24 ze dne 10.05.1924.

who had come with him. In November 1923, MAKHNO was put on trial along with his illegitimate wife Halina KUZMENKO and 2 adjutants CHMARA and MATULENKO on suspicion of escaping from the camp, communicating with the Bolshevik mission in Warsaw, and plotting an uprising in Eastern Galicia. For lack of evidence, however, they were acquitted, and Ataman Makhno was allowed to settle in Toruń.

Makhno was only 32 years old, but his past was very rich and notorious. This adventurer, at the head of several thousand molojecs [young men – author’s note] from the Kherson and Podolia gubernia, as well as from the Black Sea coast, became the scourge not only of the courts and estates which he raided and ravaged, but also of all those who opposed him.

Makhno had more than one very bloody skirmish with the Bolsheviks, from whom he eventually had to flee from Ukraine. He had many supporters, especially among the inhabitants of his hometown of GULYAIPOLE, but he also had many hidden adversaries who regarded him as a mere thief, robber, and bloody bandit. He is universally hated by the Jews, as he often organised pogroms and bloody massacres against them, although he showed no more mercy to Christians. According to witnesses, he also treated Poles cruelly. Makhno was of an exuberant and untamed nature, sowing death and fire for many years, proclaiming that what he was doing was necessary – no matter how much it cost a sea of human blood and called out to heaven for vengeance – to bring about anarchy in Ukraine, from which he – Makhno – would then deliver it. This was convenient for the anarchist leadership, which began to favour him, sending him money from Berlin.

He did not carry out his anarchist plans, however, and succumbed under the pressure of nervousness, disillusionment, disappointment and the mania which had recently been evident in him, and which led him to commit suicide.

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people who trust me and who themselves live beyond the borders of the Soviet Government. I am in constant contact with anarchist organisations in the West – in Berlin and Paris. It is from them, moreover, that I must draw my livelihood today. I firmly believe that I shall succeed in establishing friendly relations with the Russian émigré community. I am sure that, having only one common enemy – the Bolsheviks – we shall find a way to agree in the organisation of joint anti-Bolshevik actions. The trial before the Warsaw court and its just verdict have shattered the bloody legend that surrounded my name. I have ceased to be a criminal and a bandit in the eyes of the majority, and it will be easier for me to find collaborators to carry out my plans». Strzałkowski's booklet on Makhno is forthcoming.

Chargé d'Affaires a.i.

AMZV. F. II. sekce 1918–39 – JMENNÁ SPISOVNA. K.Č. 45. Spis č.j. 000743/II/24 ze dne 02.01.1924.

№ 5

Embassy of the Czechoslovak Republic in Warsaw, no. 349/pol. res/24.

Ataman MAKHNO, committing suicide. Extraordinary political report. 10 May 1924.

To the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in PRAGUE.

The «Echo» newspaper of Warsaw carried an interesting report in the month of April from Toruń that the Ataman «Batko» MAKHNO, living there, had cut his throat with suicidal intent.

As the local embassy reported in its report No. 729/I-23 of 14 December (on the local decree No. 207.490/II-23), Ataman MAKHNO had arrived in Poland a year ago from Romania and was interned in Strzałkowo together with 17 Ukrainian comrades and adjutants

Polish Republic, in which I had sought hospitality. But the court of your homeland did not take the position of class reckoning with me, did not follow in the footsteps of the Bolshevik 'Troika' in their famous tribunal, whose ruthlessness is not sufficiently known to all the people of Europe, so that many still consider it to be a manifestation of some kind of justice. The Warsaw Regional Court stood solely on a position of impartiality and fairness: it called as witnesses those who spoke against me and those who testified for me. And by allowing my defence counsel to freely recount the whole tangled affair, he was able to refute the numerous accusations levelled against me and not of my making. The glorious court of the Polish Republic has acquitted me and my comrades, and by its definitive verdict has set straight the erroneous attitude of the administrative authorities and the entire Polish public towards me. Today, as a free inhabitant of the Polish land, I consider it my duty to note that I believe that, since the previous judgments against me have been settled and resolved, any lingering distrust of me will disappear from the cultural public of Poland, and in return an impartial and fair judgment of me will be established, and at the same time the shadows that fell on my name – the dark aspersions of bandit and enemy of the Polish nation, which I never was and am not – will be definitively dispelled».

The letter was written in Warsaw.

At the same time «Express Poranny» published an interview with Ataman Makhno in which the following was stated: «These days I want to leave Warsaw. The Polish authorities have marked one of the Poznan towns as my permanent residence, where I shall live with my wife and my comrades, who, however, will probably be placed separately at the request of the authorities. As far as the future is concerned, I do not wish to leave Poland, and I can steadfastly declare that I have been, I am, and I shall remain for the rest of my life, an implacable opponent of the Bolsheviks and the Soviet Government. I shall fight them ruthlessly with the help of those

Abstract: *The article introduces two handwritten letters of Nestor Makhno to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Czechoslovakia and to President Tomáš G. Masaryk. It also publishes hitherto unknown documents from the Archive of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic that partly charted Makhno's fate in the years 1922–1924. The article expands and completes the source base of research on Makhno's exile. For the first time, it puts these sources in the context of the Russian Aid Operation and activities of Makhno in Poland. An analysis of the two letters reveals how Makhno perceived Czechoslovakia; what he expected from it and how he presented himself to T.G. Masaryk. On the basis of archival documents, the attitude of the Czechoslovak authorities towards Makhno can be partially explained.*

Based on his historical experience, Makhno compared the Czech nation to that of the Ukrainians, and he also believed that «Czechoslovak Slavonicity» could indicate potential solidarity with the Ukrainian nation. Initially, in Czechoslovakia, Makhno intended to launch his resistance against Bolshevism. Nevertheless, although the sources are ambiguous, owing to the miserable living conditions experienced in Polish exile, it is likely that he also dreamed of repatriation from Czechoslovakia. Moreover, Makhno was purposely vague in describing his role and the situation in Poland to Masaryk to curry favour. Due to Czechoslovakia's geopolitical goals, any tendencies towards an uprising against Bolshevism with the goal of Ukrainian independence were perceived rather negatively. The Czechoslovak authorities viewed Makhno unfavourably because of the Polish press. He was described as a «bogyman» of the landowners, and was seen as a distrustful bandit rather than a principled anarchist.

During 1921 Nestor Makhno gradually began to lose the «backbone» of makhnovshchina – the war-demoralised peasantry. He and his followers were under constant pressure from the Red

Army and forced to flee into exile. He stayed seven months in Romania, then escaped in chaotic circumstances to Poland, where he spent just over two years. Makhno thus spent the rest of his life in adverse and desperate conditions. Moreover, in states that were ashamed of his presence and in which he aroused fears. Makhno and makhnovshchina have become the subject of study by many Ukrainian, Russian and Anglo-Saxon historians such as V.A. Savchenko,¹ V.N. Volkovynskyi,² V.M. Chop,³ A.V. Shubin,⁴ M. Palij⁵ and C. Darch.⁶ Research on Makhno's exile has often focused on his stay in Romania, Poland, Germany, and France. The Polish historians M. Przyborowski and D. Wierzchoś have made a significant contribution to the research, publishing documents from the fonds of the Polish archives, which complement the archival materials in the Czech Republic.⁷ However, within the historiography of Makhno's exile, the issue of Czechoslovakia has been neglected. Interpretations have often been limited to the thesis that Makhno tried to escape to Czechoslovakia or that he asked the Polish authorities to allow him to leave.⁸ For example, Ukrainian historian Olena Humeniuk only briefly described that one of the reasons Makhno was interned were rumours of his pos-

¹ *Савченко В.А.* Проект «Україна»: Махновська Трудова федерація (1917–1921). Харків: Фоліо, 2018.

² *Волковинський В.Н.* Нестор Махно: легенда і реальність. Київ: Перліт Продакшн, 1994.

³ *Чоп В.М.* Нестор Махно: останній селянський герой. Київ: Мистецтво, 2019.

⁴ *Шубин А.В.* Махно и его время. О Великой революции и Гражданской войне 1917–1922 гг. в России и на Украине. Москва: УРСС, 2014.

⁵ *Palij M.* The Anarchism of Nestor Makhno, 1918–1921: An Aspect of the Ukrainian Revolution. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1976.

⁶ *Darch C.* Nestor Makhno and Rural Anarchism in Ukraine, 1917–1921. London: Pluto Press, 2020.

⁷ *Przyborowski M., Wierzchoś D.* Machno w Polsce. Poznań: Oficyna Bractwa Trojka, 2012.

⁸ *Савченко В.А.* Вказ. пр. С. 283; *Волковинський В.Н.* Вказ. пр. С. 235; *Шубин А.В.* Указ. соч. С. 298; *Darch C.* Op. cit. P. 133–134.

Yours sincerely

Leader of the Revolutionary Insurgent Army of Ukraine / Makhnovists / N. Makhno [in his own hand – *Author's note*]

30 June 1922.

Poland, internment camp Strzałkowo.

AMZV. F. II. sekce 1918–39 – JMENNÁ SPISOVNA. K.Č. 45. Spis č.j. 125126/II/22 ze dne 22.08.1922.

Copy of the letter incompletely translated in Czech: AKPR. F. KPR – protokol T. Sign. T 74/22. K. 79. Č.j. T 1509/22; VÚA-VHA. F. VKPR. K.Č. 48. Č.j. 2491.

№ 4

Embassy of the Czechoslovak Republic in Warsaw, 1636/6/II/23, Open letter of Ataman Makhno to the Poles. Conversation with Makhno. 2 January 1924.

In the «Kurier Poranny» of 28 December, an «Open Letter from Nestor Makhno to the Polish Cultural Public» was published, which reads as follows: «A year and eight months have passed since I crossed the borders of your homeland! I stood on your soil and was preceded by the sad fame of a «bandit», for which I thanked both the villainous gossip of the Russian Bolshevik Communists and, unfortunately, also some of your compatriots who, for reasons known only to them, tried to portray me as such in the press before the Polish nation. The Polish public, believing these slanders, took an unfavourable attitude towards me. And this position of the Polish cultural public contributed to the fact that the government of the Polish Republic also adopted an incorrect position towards me and my collaborators, which led us first to the camp in Strzałkowo, later to the prison in Mokotów, and then to the dock on charges of a grave crime against the integrity of the

my rebel army into small detachments, and I myself, accompanied by hundreds of convoys, arrived in Romania at the end of 1921 and sought to recover my health. When my wounds had healed, I went with a detachment of 14 men to Ukraine in the spring of 1922 based on reports from my rebel groups. However, during our stay in Ukraine, unforeseen circumstances forced us to enter the territory of Poland.

The difficult political conditions which Poland has been experiencing lately – the constant threats from Soviet Russia – have forced her to forget Slavic hospitality and to hold all political emigrants captive, which was also done to me and my troops. And new efforts by the Bolsheviks to remove me and my people from Polish territory have placed me in conditions compared to which even life in the Czarist dungeons pale. The Czech nation, which has been under the yoke of foreign occupation, more than anyone else will understand the suffering of the centuries-long oppressed Ukrainian nation and our striving for its future betterment, for which we have borne the hardships of imprisonment.

I think we deserve something more than the prison of the Western nations for our four-year struggle. To date, no other European state has so sincerely accommodated refugees from the former Russia – irrespective of differences of political conviction – as Czechoslovakia has done. Sincere gratitude will be the reward of a brotherly Slavic nation which, in evil times, gave refuge to unfortunate refugees from their homeland. I turn to you, as an old revolutionary and socialist, on whom it depends for us to live freely in your country after the four-year Bolshevik paradise and the fraternal Polish prison until we can return to our homeland. I ask you, Mr. President, to instruct the Government of the Republic to grant permission of entry for me and 12 people of my entourage. I have submitted an application to this effect to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Czechoslovak Republic. I hope that we will be given refuge like other political emigrants whose stay on Polish territory was impossible for the same reason as ours.

sible escape to Czechoslovakia. She also noted that these rumours were based on the contents of Makhno's letter to the Czechoslovak President Tomáš G. Masaryk, in which he «described his situation and asked to be admitted in the country».⁹

The study introduces two handwritten letters of Makhno to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Czechoslovakia and to T.G. Masaryk. Both letters are stored in the Archive of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic (AMZV). The Foreign Ministry received the first letter on 7 August,¹⁰ and the second on 22 August 1922.¹¹ A copy of the second letter sent by Makhno to Masaryk, which has been translated into Czech, is deposited in the Archives of the Office of the President of the Republic (AKPR)¹² and the Military Central Archive (VÚA-VHA).¹³ This letter is also published in the edition of the correspondence between Masaryk and the Ukrainians without the date of sending and acceptance.¹⁴ AMZV also possesses two documents relating to Makhno's exile in Poland in 1922–1924, mapping his activities based on «political reports» from the Czechoslovak Embassy in Warsaw. The reports contain fragments from the Polish press, such as «Kurier Poranny», «Express Poranny» or «Echo». These

⁹ Гуменюк О.А. Нестор Махно в Польщі: маріонетка польсько-радянського протистояння чи безкомпромісний лідер анархістів // *Срібняк І. Над Wisłą i Dnieprem. Polska i Ukraina w przestrzeni europejskiej – przeszłość i teraźniejszość*. Warszawa-Toruń: Międzynarodowy konsorcium naukowo-edukacyjny im. Luciena Febvra, 2019. С. 17.

¹⁰ Archiv Ministerstva zahraničních věcí České republiky (hereinafter AMZV). F. II. sekce 1918–39 – JMENNÁ SPISOVNA. K.Č. 45. Spis č.j. 117402/II/22 ze dne 07.08.1922.

¹¹ AMZV. F. II. sekce 1918–39 – JMENNÁ SPISOVNA. K.Č. 45. Spis č.j. 125126/II/22 ze dne 22.08.1922.

¹² Archiv Kanceláře prezidenta republiky (hereinafter AKPR). F. KPR – protokol T. Sign. T 74/22. K. 79. Č.j. T 1509/22.

¹³ Vojenský ústřední archiv (hereinafter VÚA-VHA). F. VKPR. K.Č. 48. Č.j. 2491.

¹⁴ *Doubek V. Korespondence T.G. Masaryk – Slované. Rusové a Ukrajinci*. 2. svazek. Praha: Masarykův ústav AV ČR, 2016. P. 189–190.

include, for example, Ataman Makhno's «Open Letter to the Poles», in which he criticised Poland for its treatment of political emigrants.¹⁵ Other reports include a description of Makhno, his anarchist movement, and information about his unsuccessful attempt to commit suicide.¹⁶ The article expands and completes the source base of research on Makhno's exile. For the first time, it puts these sources in the context of the so-called Russian Aid Operation (also known as «Russian Action») and activities of Makhno in Poland. Based on the published archival documents, it is possible to interpret to some extent: 1) how Makhno perceived Czechoslovakia and what he expected from it; 2) how he presented himself to T.G. Masaryk; 3) what attitude the Czechoslovak authorities may have had towards Makhno. Therefore, the study aims to encourage scientific discourse on this issue and to make available hitherto unknown documents from the Czech archives.

On 11 April 1922, Makhno and his group crossed the border into Poland. Czechoslovak documents, like their Polish equivalents, stated that Makhno was seeking «hospitality» in the country.¹⁷ Makhno's nearly two-year stay in Poland was not easy. Unlike in Romania, where he could have organized the struggle against Bolshevism, he found himself imprisoned in a refugee camp Strzałkowo, where he had to perform forced labour. Makhno was disillusioned with Poland's attitude. In a letter to Masaryk, he wrote that it had forgotten «Slavic hospitality» and was «putting all political emigrants behind wires [the Strzałkowo refugee camp – *Author's note*]». He thought that he would at least be treated with dignity and respect, based on his past efforts to wage partisan warfare against Bolshevism. After his capture in Poland, he began to

¹⁵ AMZV. F. II. sekce 1918–39 – JMENNÁ SPISOVNA. K.Č. 45. Spis č.j. 000743/II/24 ze dne 02.01.1924.

¹⁶ AMZV. F. II. sekce 1918–39 – JMENNÁ SPISOVNA. K.Č. 45. Spis č.j. 079265/II/24 ze dne 10.05.1924.

¹⁷ Przyborowski M., Wierzchoś D. Op. cit. P. 186.

Mr. President-elect,
I address you as an old revolutionary and socialist. You have seen that the coup of 1917, by which the despotic centralist order in Russia was overthrown, made it possible for all the peoples inhabiting it to proceed independently to build their lives on new revolutionary foundations. However, various adventurers and demagogic parties prevented this, and tried, with the help of their supporters both from the right and from the left, to seize control of the nation. And the people, in order to assert the will of the workers in these places, and in order to rebuild the order on new revolutionary foundations, had to take up arms to defend their social and national independence, and to fight to exhaustion to save at least a remnant of revolutionary gains from the various usurpers of the government.

The Czech nation, which, like the Ukrainian nation, suffered under the burden of foreign occupation, was, however, more fortunate. It is already free, has a democratic government, and can operate freely in its homeland. But a different fate has befallen the Ukrainian nation, which for four years has been spilling the blood of its sons over the Ukrainian steppe in the struggle for social and national independence and for the right to be master in its homeland. I, as a political prisoner, was freed from the prison of the revolutionary days of 1917. As an old political worker, I could not remain a bystander to the mass political movement that reigned at that time in the territory of the former Russia and I started organisational work in the Katerinoslav gub. But for a long time, we [Makhnovists – *author's note*] could not devote ourselves to calm organisational work because people appeared who only wanted to take advantage of the disordered conditions to satisfy their own ambitions. It was necessary to abandon the peaceful creative work to take up arms and defend the gains of the revolution. During four years of armed struggle for social and national independence I was wounded and driven to complete exhaustion nine times. By order of the Revolutionary Insurgent Military Council, I disbanded

AMZV. F. II. sekce 1918–39 – JMENNÁ SPISOVNÁ. K.Č. 45. Spis č.j. 117402/II/22 ze dne 07.08.1922.

№ 2

Letter from the Military Office of the President of the Republic forwarding Makhno's request for permission to enter Czechoslovakia to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. 21 August 1922.

To the Ministry of Foreign Affairs into the hands of Legislative Officer Brož [state official – *Author's note*], in Prague on 21 August 1922.

A letter written by N. Makhno, interned in Poland, addressed to the President of the Czechoslovak Republic, is being processed, which contains a request for permission for the applicant and his entourage to enter the Czechoslovak Republic.

It is respectfully requested that N. Makhno be notified by the Embassy of Czechoslovakia in Warsaw that his letter addressed to the President of the Republic has been received and that it has been forwarded by the President's office to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

1 Annex and translation. [Makhno's letter was also translated into Czech – *Author's note*]

AMZV. F. II. sekce 1918–39 – JMENNÁ SPISOVNÁ. K.Č. 45. Spis č.j. 125126/II/22 ze dne 22.08.1922.

№ 3

Second letter of Makhno to T.G. Masaryk. 30 June 1922 (received 22 August 1922).

present himself in the West as an intellectual and political emigrant.

In May 1922, an amnesty was declared in the internment camp for all those who had fought against Bolshevism, except for military and political leaders like Makhno.¹⁸ He became increasingly demoralized by Poland's attitude and decided to leave the country. He is supposed to have written up to twelve statements requesting permission to leave for Czechoslovakia or Germany, which he addressed to the Polish Foreign Ministry, the Sejm, and Prime Minister Józef Piłsudski. On 28 July 1922, he asked the Foreign Ministry to allow him to leave: «My stay in internment makes my existence impossible [...] for this reason, I ask the Ministry of the Republic of Poland for an arrangement on the part of the Foreign Ministry of Czechoslovakia to allow me and my group of 16 persons to leave the territory. Please, esteemed Ministry, help me to leave, like [...] other political emigrants».¹⁹

Makhno began to pin his hopes on Czechoslovakia, where the Russian Aid Operation was launched in September 1921. This consisted of aid to the starving in Russia and Ukraine, as well as support for emigrants. At the beginning of 1922, Masaryk stated that the aim was «to reacclimatize members of the Russian intelligentsia [...] and especially young people [...] to escape the vagaries and demoralization of their dreadful exile».²⁰ On 30 July 1922, Makhno sent him a letter requesting permission to come, having already sent another letter to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Czechoslovakia two days before.²¹ In these letter he

¹⁸ Гуменюк О.А. Нестор Махно в Польщі... С. 17.

¹⁹ Przyborowski, Wierchoś. Op. cit. P. 132–133.

²⁰ Masaryk T.G. Specializace pomocné akce: příklad Československa // Olivová V. Otevřít Rusko Evropě. Praha: Společnost Edvarda Beneše, 1997. P. 19.

²¹ AMZV. F. II. sekce 1918–39 – JMENNÁ SPISOVNÁ. K.Č. 45. Spis č.j. 117402/II/22 ze dne 07.08.1922; AMZV. F. II. sekce 1918–39 – JMENNÁ SPISOVNÁ. K.Č. 45. Spis č.j. 125126/II/22 ze dne 22.08.1922; VÚA-VHA. F. VKPR. K. Č. 48. Č.j. 2491.

briefly and indirectly outlined the history of makhnovshchina in a manner to curry favour. He expected Czechoslovakia to provide him with temporary refuge from Bolshevism. Makhno is not specific in the letter, but it is likely that he intended later on to travel back to Ukraine via Czechoslovakia. In addition, he was probably familiar with the Russian Aid Operation. He wrote: «To date, no other European state has so sincerely accommodated refugees from former Russia irrespective of differences of political conviction as Czechoslovakia has done».²²

In connection with these beliefs, both letters reveal Makhno's view of Czechoslovakia. He drew a comparison between the Czech and Ukrainian nations based on historical experience: «The Czech nation, which, like the Ukrainian nation, was under the pressure of foreign occupation, was, however, more fortunate».²³ Makhno perceived the notion of «occupation» in terms of the conditions of Czechs in Austria-Hungary and vaguely linked it to the situation in Ukraine after the February revolution. He was convinced this historical analogy would indicate Czechoslovak solidarity with the Ukrainian people. Makhno together with other émigrés believed that Russia's displaced should reside in an ostensibly Slavic nation receptive to their needs.²⁴ He referred to Czechoslovakian solidarity. For example, he argued for a possible «congruence» with the Czechoslovak «fraternal» nation, describing it as a «liberated» nation in contrast to its Ukrainian counterpart.

The evolution of Makhno's thoughts on the nationality issue was particularly complex because of his involvement in the «Russian» anarchist movement.²⁵ Makhno was interested in presenting

²² AMZV. F. II. sekce 1918–39 – JMENNÁ SPISOVNA. K.Č. 45. Spis č.j. 125126/II/22 ze dne 22.08.1922.

²³ Ibidem.

²⁴ Johnson S. 'Communism in Russia Only Exists on Paper': Czechoslovakia and the Russian Refugee Crisis, 1919–1924 // Contemporary European History. 2007. Vol. 16. № 3. P. 374.

²⁵ Масненко В.В. Нестор Махно й Україна: до проблеми самоідентифікації «селянського батька» // Український селянин. 2019.

To the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Czechoslovak Republic.

Leader of the Revolutionary Insurgent Army of Ukraine / Makhnovists / N. Makhno

Request

The revolutionary struggle against the various occupiers of government over the Ukrainian nation has forced us, as well as other political emigrants who are here abroad, to seek refuge and protection in Western countries. I myself with a group of 13 people and my wife have found refuge in the territory of the Republic of Poland, which has taken us in temporarily. But since Poland is now in a difficult political situation, the government of the Republic [of Poland – *Author's note*] has been forced to put us in a camp behind wires. Our life in confinement [in the refugee camp – *author's note*] is morally and physically extremely difficult for us, and the Polish government cannot give us permission to live freely in our own country for the same reasons that it did not give it to Savinkov, Gnilyorbov, Petliura and other political emigrants. In view of the above, I beg the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to take measures before the Government of the Republic to permit us to enter and stay in their territory until the opportunity to return to our country presents itself. We know that hospitable Czechoslovakia offers a fraternal refuge to all political emigrants from former Russia. We have hope that a fraternal and Slavic country with a broad democratic government in charge will not refuse our request.

Leader of the Revolutionary Insurgent Army of Ukraine / Makhnovists / N. Makhno [in his own hand – *Author's note*]

Temporarily performing the duties of Chief of Staff [signature illegible – *Author's note*]

Adjutant Domashchenko [in his own hand – *Author's note*]

28 June 1922.

Poland, camp Strzałkowo.

Makhno's insurgent method of fighting Bolshevism was contrary to Czechoslovakia's foreign policy. The aim of the Russian Aid Operation was a stable, democratic civil society in both Russia and Czechoslovakia⁷⁴. In Poland, moreover, Makhno was constantly under police surveillance on suspicion of possible escape to Ukraine, was regularly summoned for questioning, and his correspondence was subject to censorship. The police report stated that «Makhno was very irritable, probably felt that he was being followed, and often dodged into doorways and around street corners».⁷⁴ A political report from the Czechoslovak embassy in Poland stated adverse conditions and constant exposure to political pressure during 1923 led to Makhno's frustration. His poor nerves and disillusionment led him to make an unsuccessful attempt to commit suicide in April 1924.⁷⁵ After his hospitalization, he was arrested again, not for political reasons, but for drunkenness and disorderly conduct. In May, he decided to leave Poland for good and go to France or Germany, and the authorities allowed him to do so on the condition that he could not return. Eventually, despite chaotic circumstances and a confusing sequence of events, Makhno managed to get to France during April 1925, where he spent the rest of his life, trying to adapt to the new conditions.

ARCHIVAL DOCUMENTS

№ 1.

First letter of Makhno to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Czechoslovakia. 28 June 1922 (received 7 August 1922)

⁷⁴ Przyborowski M., *Wierchoś D.* Op. cit. P. 85.

⁷⁵ AMZV. F. II. sekce 1918–39 – JMENNÁ SPISOVNA. K.Č. 45. Spis č.j. 079265/II/24 ze dne 10.05.1924.

himself and the anarchists as the only true purveyors of freedom for Ukraine.²⁶ This is supported by his letter to Masaryk, in which he does not even explicitly mention makhnovshchina or anarchism. In this way, he tried to present himself simply as a Ukrainian revolutionary fighting for freedom. Makhno mentioned to Masaryk that «he, as an old political worker [sic], [...] started organizational work in the Katerinoslav gub. But for a long time, we [Makhnovists – *Author's note*] could not devote ourselves to calm organizational work because people appeared who only wanted to take advantage of the disordered conditions to satisfy their own ambitions».²⁷

Makhno's letter also reflects, to some extent, his concept of a Ukrainian revolution. He perceived the February revolution in Russia as a stage in which the «despotic centralist order» was overthrown and in which existed the impulse to implement the building of society on new foundations within peasant conditions. He saw the Bolshevik revolution and the subsequent Sovietization of south-eastern Ukraine as a violent wrecking of his aspirations. According to Makhno, Bolshevism, designed to be embodied within a centralized state, undermined the natural development of a revolution that was supposed to align with the interests of the masses.²⁸ Makhno believed his conception of events in Russia would align with Masaryk's own views, which is why he addressed him in his letter as «an old revolutionary and socialist».

Due to the lack of documents, Masaryk's opinion of Makhno is not explicitly known. Thus, it can be inferred from his attitudes

№ 21. С. 22; *Кривенький В.В.* Анархистское движение в России в первой четверти XX века: теория, организация, практика. Москва: РОССПЭН, 2018. С. 302–303.

²⁶ *Sysyn F.* Nestor Makhno and the Ukrainian Revolution // *Hunczak T.* The Ukraine, 1917–1921: A Study in Revolution. Cambridge: Harvard Ukrainian Research Institute, 1978. P. 271–304.

²⁷ AMZV. F. II. sekce 1918–39 – JMENNÁ SPISOVNA. K.Č. 45. Spis č.j. 125126/II/22 ze dne 22.08.1922.

²⁸ *Махно Н.И.* Идея равенства и большевиков // *Дело труда.* 1926. № 9. С. 9.

towards Ukraine and anarchism. Masaryk rejected Ukrainian separatism because he was convinced that it would harm Czechoslovak interests.²⁹ In his goals for Czechoslovakia, he operated with the same separatist reasoning as the Ukrainians. But having a comparable goal did not bring him closer to Ukrainian aims. He thus judged potential allies according to their actual relationship to Germany and Austria-Hungary.³⁰ Masaryk disagreed with the idea of anarchism. He said of its supporters that they «proclaimed absolute personal freedom without regard to the interests of the whole».³¹ He saw anarchism, combined with Bakuninism and the traditions of autocracy, as a product of Bolshevism.³² He even stated that «Russia cannot develop peacefully without Europe, but Europe cannot develop without Russia».³³

Makhno's concept of syndicalism, which he had tried to establish in 1917–1921, was at odds with Masaryk's views. The Czechoslovak President did not follow Makhno's activities during the civil war, nor did he take any interest in them. Nor can it be stated with certainty that Masaryk responded to letter of Makhno. The Military Office of the President of the Republic, which received Makhno's request on 21 August 1922, forwarded it to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs the following day. Czechoslovakia's policy was to make itself a de facto reliable, active, and independently advancing actor on the Central European scene in the eyes of the Allies, with an interest in some mediation in attempts to further

²⁹ Z řeči prof. Masaryka na informační schůzi OČSNR v Kyjevě dne 14.(1.) února 1918 // Československý deník. 1918. 8. února. P. 1–2.

³⁰ Doubek V. Mezi válkou a terorem: Tomáš G. Masaryk, Boris V. Savinkov a Michail A. Muravjov // Slovanský přehled. 2018. Vol. 1. P. 28.

³¹ Naše vojsko, Z řeči prof. Masaryka na společné schůzi členů odbočky ČSNR v Kyjevě 30. ledna 1918 // Československý deník. 1918. 3. února. P. 1.

³² Vlček R. Ruské revoluce a T.G. Masaryk // Hanuš J., Vlček R. Interpretace ruské revoluce 1917. Brno: Centrum pro studium demokracie a kultury, 2008. P. 26.

³³ Masaryk T.G. Specializace pomocné akce: příklad Československa // Olivová V. Op cit. P. 18.

fact that he had spent several years in Moscow's Butyrka Prison for expropriation and subversion.⁷⁰

After almost two years, the Czechoslovak authorities had formed a relatively clear and negative image of Makhno. The report from the Czechoslovak embassy in Warsaw noted: «Makhno was only 32 years old, but his past was very colourful and notorious. This adventurer, at the head of several thousand young men [molojecs in original text – *Author's note*] from the Kherson and Podolia governorates as well as from the Black Sea coast, became a terror not only to the courts and landowners, which he plundered and ravaged, but also to all those who opposed him».⁷¹ These aspects point to the general attitude towards Makhno in Czechoslovakia. Makhno was seen more as a military commander, possibly a robber, than as a genuine anarchist thinker. Although Makhno regarded himself as an implacable «opponent of Bolshevism», he was viewed as a distrustful bandit. The report also stated that «he [Makhno – *Author's note*] had many supporters, especially among the inhabitants of his hometown of HULAYPOLA, but he also had many hidden opponents who considered him to be just a common thief, robber and the bloody bandit».⁷² Due to Czechoslovakia's geopolitical goals, any tendencies towards an uprising against Bolshevism with the goal of Ukrainian independence were perceived rather negatively. The Czechoslovak business mission sent a report from Kharkiv to Prague in late 1921 in which it referred to uprisings and «banditry». The report downplayed their significance, however, with the statement that they had no political importance and lacked organization and strength.⁷³

⁷⁰ AMZV. F. II. sekce 1918–39 – JMENNÁ SPISOVNA. K.Č. 45. Spis č.j. 125126/II/22 ze dne 22.08.1922.

⁷¹ AMZV. F. II. sekce 1918–39 – JMENNÁ SPISOVNA. K.Č. 45. Spis č.j. 079265/II/24 ze dne 10.05.1924.

⁷² Ibidem.

⁷³ AMZV. F. Politické zprávy (PZ) Charkov 1921. Č. 103.

up to 75% of the population of the Zaporozhye region suffered from famine in mid-1922.⁶⁶ In 1921 Makhno himself admitted that he did not have many «active» allies among the peasants.

We know from Makhno's letters to Prague requesting permission to come that he misrepresented and generalized his role. Even though the makhnovshchina had disintegrated and the Makhnovists had become refugees, Makhno titled himself in the letters as «the Leader of the Revolutionary Insurgent Army of Ukraine /Makhnovists/». The first letter was even signed by other members of his staff, such as Adjutant Iakov Domashchenko.⁶⁷ Moreover, one passage of Makhno's letter sounds ironic, almost sarcastic, when it states he would greatly appreciate Czechoslovakia's help «after four years in the Bolshevik paradise and the fraternal Polish prison».⁶⁸ It is possible that a demoralized Makhno wrote the contents of the letter to Masaryk vaguely on purpose, in an attempt to secure the support of the Czechoslovak authorities. His anarchist convictions often made him a potential enemy of any state.⁶⁹ For example, he described in relatively simplistic terms how he, accompanied by hundreds of convoys, had escaped to Romania from Ukraine at the end of 1921 only to be medically «treated». Makhno, however, was more tactical. It may have been for pragmatic reasons and because of the influence of censorship by the Polish police. Makhno, who considered himself a «practical anarchist» and whose forte in exile had become the makhnovshchina, suspiciously limited his aspirations in one of the letters to expressions such as «organizational work» and «creative activity», even describing himself as an «old political worker». In a letter to Masaryk, he also depicted himself as a «political prisoner» and ignored the

⁶⁶ NA ČR. F. MZV-RPA. Inv. č. 44. K. č. 14. Č.j. 093838/II/22 ze dne 21.06.1922.

⁶⁷ AMZV. F. II. sekce 1918–39 – JMENNÁ SPISOVNA. K.Č. 45. Spis č.j. 117402/II/22 ze dne 07.08.1922.

⁶⁸ AMZV. F. II. sekce 1918–39 – JMENNÁ SPISOVNA. K.Č. 45. Spis č.j. 125126/II/22 ze dne 22.08.1922.

⁶⁹ Гумениук О.А. Нестор Махно в Польщі... С. 16.

stabilize Russia.³⁴ Masaryk, together with the Czech government, assumed that Bolshevism in Russia might eventually collapse. He also noted that «communism in Russia exists only on paper».³⁵ For him, the optimal solution was a broad centre-left government with the participation of the Bolsheviks, which would lead Russia out of the turbulent and unstable times.³⁶ According to one of the Russian emigrants who lived in Prague «the Czech government thought that the Bolsheviks wouldn't hold their ground. Four months, six months, maybe a year, but they couldn't possibly hold out any longer than that. [...] They [the Czech government – *Author's note*] reckoned that within a year, or two at the most, the old regime would be reinstated».³⁷

Given that Makhno was interned, in a letter to Masaryk he considered Poland the «prison of the Western nations».³⁸ That is why he also tried to escape to Czechoslovakia. According to a report made by an officer at the Strzałkowo camp, Makhno had initially planned to wage guerrilla warfare in Ukraine, but it was subsequently discovered that he and his associates had sought to contact the former chairman of the West Ukrainian People's Republic (WUPR) Evhen O. Petrushevych (1863–1940) as early as July.³⁹ Petrushevych was convinced that Eastern Galicia was entitled to exist as a separate state, and he maintained contact with Masaryk during 1922.⁴⁰ At the beginning of the following year, he travelled from Vienna, where the political representation of the WUPR was

³⁴ Doubek V. Korespondence T.G. Masaryk... P. 15.

³⁵ Quoted by: Johnson S. 'Communism in Russia Only Exists on Paper'... P. 377.

³⁶ Doubek V. Mezi válkou a terorem... P. 31.

³⁷ Katkov G. Masaryk's Guests // Stone N., Glennly M. The Other Russia. London: Faber and Faber, 1991. P. 255.

³⁸ AMZV. F. II. sekce 1918–39 – JMENNÁ SPISOVNA. K.Č. 45. Spis č.j. 125126/II/22 ze dne 22.08.1922.

³⁹ Przyborowski M., Wierchoś D. Op. cit. P. 130.

⁴⁰ AKPR. F. KPR – protokol R. Inv. č. 891. Sign. R 17960/23. K. 13. Č.j. A1113/1923.

based, to Prague, where he was granted an audience by Masaryk. Suspicion of Makhno's escape was probably justified because the camp administration reported that seven members of his group had escaped from internment at the end of July and the beginning of August with the intention of going to Soviet Russia.⁴¹ Several of Makhno's supporters did probably escape from Poland because the number of his men differed in the two letters addressed to Masaryk and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Czechoslovakia. Makhno mentions thirteen supporters in the first letter, written on 28 June 1922, but only twelve in the second, written two days later.⁴² When he asked the Polish Foreign Ministry, he mentioned sixteen people.⁴³

The Polish authorities' concerns over Makhno's escape and suspicion of his collaboration with Petrushevych stemmed from the fact that Makhno had made parallel efforts to contact the Bolsheviks through his wife Halyna Kuzmenko. She had applied to the consul of the Ukrainian SSR for a visa to travel to Kharkiv, where Makhnovists were to negotiate with the Bolsheviks the terms of repatriation.⁴⁴ The draft agreement consisted of several points that were supposed to signal a compromise between the Makhnovists and the Bolsheviks. De facto, it legitimized the rule of the Bolsheviks in return for allowing the Makhnovist movement to coexist in south-eastern Ukraine. A letter from the consular department of the Ukrainian SSR embassy in Poland stated that «the Makhnovists are very dissatisfied with their life in the camp and want to return them to their homeland. Their fighting spirit has also waned.

⁴¹ Przyborowski M., *Wierchoś D.* Op. cit. P. 134–135.

⁴² Ibid. P. 132–133; AMZV. F. II. sekce 1918–39 – JMENNÁ SPISOVNA. K.Č. 45. Spis č.j. 117402/II/22 ze dne 07.08.1922; č.j. 125126/II/22 ze dne 22.08.1922.

⁴³ Archiwum Akt Nowych (hereinafter AAN). F. MSZ. Sygn. 6742. K. 43–44.

⁴⁴ Данилов В., Шанин Т. Нестор Махно: Крестьянское движение на Украине, 1918–1921: Документы и материалы. Москва: РОССПЭН, 2006. С. 838–839.

living conditions in exile and decided to cross the border into the USSR.⁶²

It cannot be said with certainty that Makhno wanted to continue his resistance against the Bolsheviks in Czechoslovakia, because his vision is not entirely clear. In short, Makhno asked Masaryk to allow him to «live freely» until he could return to his homeland. While in his letter to Masaryk, he asked for refuge from Bolshevism, he was also trying to get back to Ukraine, or alternatively head to France or Germany, where his close anarchist allies such as Peter A. Arshinov had taken up residence. Makhno hoped to establish friendly contacts with Russian émigrés, who besides Prague were also gathered in Berlin and Paris. Following his unsuccessful attempt to escape from Poland, Czechoslovakia seemed to be one of the countries that could ensure his repatriation.

In Czechoslovakia, Makhno could possibly have tried to get the authorities to return him to Galicia, or alternatively also to Gulyaipole. In early 1925, for example, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs attempted to return Ukrainian refugees and prisoners to Eastern Galicia.⁶³ Makhno's nostalgic dream was only reported by the anarchist and co-publisher of «Delo truda», Ida Mett. In 1927, during his stay in Paris, Makhno told her that he would like to return to Gulyaipole, where he would like to live an orderly peasant life with a young peasant girl.⁶⁴ Makhno sought to prepare the potential battlefield for Ukrainian independence by concentrating on his political program.⁶⁵ South-eastern Ukraine did not seem to be an ideal environment for Makhno to reignite the rebellion. Reportedly,

⁶² Симонова Т.М. Прометеизм во внешней политике Польши. 1919–1924 гг. // Новая и новейшая история. 2002. № 4. С. 55–56.

⁶³ AMZV. F. I. sekce 1918–39, oddělení I/3. K.Č. 18. Č.j. 020596/I-3/25 ze dne 09.02.1925.

⁶⁴ Mett I. Makhno in Paris. URL: www.nestormakhno.info

⁶⁵ Турченко Г. Махновський рух і українська ідея // Наукові праці історичного факультету Запорізького національного університету. 2017. № 48. С. 103.

counter-revolutionary action.⁵⁸ Makhno would not meet at least one criterion in this case.

One of the reasons the authorities did not grant Makhno's request may have been the superficial information he gave about his stay in Poland. Makhno was vague and disingenuous, referring to the «difficult political situation» and the Polish government's unwillingness to grant him freedom. Makhno himself vaguely claimed to Masaryk that he had travelled to Ukraine with several Makhnovists during the spring of 1922, but he was forced to go to Poland due to «unforeseen circumstances».⁵⁹ In fact, Romania refused to allow him to enter the territory of the Ukrainian SSR and moved him and his group to the north of the country.⁶⁰ Makhno also argued that Polish reticence was for the same reasons that the government did not grant freedom to the revolutionary Boris V. Savinkov or, for example, the Major General of the White Army Mikhail N. Gnilorybov.⁶¹ Savinkov had waged a guerrilla war against the Bolsheviks in 1921, with Poland providing him refuge and base against them. After the Peace of Riga, however, Poland decided to expel Savinkov from the country in return for a quick payment of millions of rubles. Gnilorybov came to Poland in 1920, where he tried to unite the Cossack groups, even making an agreement with Savinkov and cooperating with UPR representatives. He and his group became demoralized by the

⁵⁸ Československá pomoc ruské a ukrajinské emigraci. Praha: Ministerstvo zahraničních věcí, 1924. P. 5.

⁵⁹ AMZV. F. II. sekce 1918–39 – JMENNÁ SPISOVNÁ. K.Č. 45. Spis č.j.125126/II/22 ze dne 22.08.1922.

⁶⁰ *Гетьманчук М.П.* Шлях Нестора Махна в еміграції: через Румунію і Польщу у 1921–1925 рр. // Вісник Національного університету «Львівська політехніка». 2008. № 612: Держава та армія. С. 111.

⁶¹ AMZV. F. II. sekce 1918–39 – JMENNÁ SPISOVNÁ. K.Č. 45. Spis č.j. 117402/II/22 ze dne 07.08.1922; AAN. F. MSZ. Sygn. 6742. K. 44.

She [Kuzmenko – *Author's note*] herself felt overburdened and reluctant».⁴⁵

Poland took an ambivalent attitude towards Makhno. On the one hand, Polish intelligence tried to persuade him to start cooperating with the Petliurists and the representatives of the Ukrainian People's Republic (UPR); on the other hand, they suspected him of wanting to incite a separatist uprising in Eastern Galicia. According to the anarchist press, Polish intelligence tried to persuade him to join the Petliurists: «Why leave Poland? The Czechs are cowards and will hand you over to Moscow! [...] Stay with us, just accept the programme of the Ukrainian People's Republic, and you will be fine!».⁴⁶ Makhno, however, consistently rejected this proposal, considering Symon Petliura and his supporters during the civil war to be counterrevolutionaries and «historical enemies». He rejected other possible proposals and declared that he wished to leave Poland and go to Czechoslovakia.⁴⁷ Even though Makhno's political and ideological goals varied depending on conditions of his life at the time, he attempted to adhere to his anarchist vision. The Polish authorities did not want Makhno to leave and were not shy of using harsh means to impose their will. Kuzmenko, who was pregnant and could travel to Warsaw as part of her treatment, also received short shrift. Her appeals to the Polish Foreign Ministry received an unyielding response: «We cannot let you leave with impunity because Polish subjects suffered from your activities in Russia».⁴⁸ Moreover, one of the reasons why Poland initially refused to allow Makhno to leave the country may have been the fear of another war against the USSR. According to the newspaper «Visti VUTsVK», some Polish lawyers warned the government not

⁴⁵ Ibid. C. 839–840.

⁴⁶ *Georgs V.* Nous sauverons Nestor Makhno // *Le Libertaire*. 1923. 16 novembre. P. 2; *Аршинов П.А., Волин В.* Махно перед поляком // *Американские известия*. 1923. № 102. 28 ноября. С. 2.

⁴⁷ *Menzies M.* Makhno, une épopée. Paris: ECHAPPEE, 2017. P. 219–220.

⁴⁸ *Аршинов П.А., Волин В.* Махно перед поляком... С. 2.

to «give up on a triumph like Makhno» because «a triumph like Savinkov, it has already lost».⁴⁹

The Czechoslovak authorities were informed of the above facts through the Polish press. Makhno and his associates came to be suspected of planning their escape from the internment camp and deliberately fomenting a separatist uprising in Eastern Galicia, with the aim of annexing it to Russia.⁵⁰ In October 1923, Makhno, his associates, and his wife were arrested and escorted to Mokotów Prison in Warsaw.⁵¹ Makhno was accused of having, through Kuzmenko, contacted the Bolsheviks with the aim to start an armed uprising in Galicia. The question of Galicia was a sensitive issue in the context of the emergence of Polish sovereignty in 1918 and because the tsars had previously considered it «Russian land [...] after all, inhabited by Russian people».⁵² The Polish press was convinced that «no one doubted that Makhno would be found guilty».⁵³ However, after five days of court proceedings, he was acquitted at the end of November because of insufficient evidence. All those released were granted residence permits and for the time being Makhno settled in Toruń. Given the bleak conditions in Polish exile, Makhno tried to find mechanisms that would enable his escape.⁵⁴ In an «Open Letter to the Poles» he tried to prove he was an enemy of the Soviet government, against which he wanted to fight systematically.

⁴⁹ Чому польський уряд виправдав Махна // Вісти ВУЦВК. 1923. № 273. С. 2.

⁵⁰ Hurwicz E. Staatsmänner und Abenteurer. Leipzig: C.L. Hirschfeld, 1925. P. 273; Горелик А. Кого судят в Варшаве // Американские известия. 1923. № 101. 21 ноября. С. 6.

⁵¹ AMZV. F. II. sekce 1918–39 – JMENNÁ SPISOVNÁ. K.Č. 45. Spis č.j. 000743/II/24 ze dne 02.01.1924; Суд над Махном // Діло. 1923. № 193. С. 6.

⁵² Suny R.G. Introduction: Bringing Empire Back // Lohr E. et al. The Empire and Nationalism at War. Bloomington: Slavica, 2014. P. 3.

⁵³ Przyborowski M., Wierchoś D. Op. cit. P. 194.

⁵⁴ Тукан В.К. Суспільно-політична діяльність Н.І. Махно в еміграції, 1921–1934 рр. // Збірник наукових праць: Серія «Історія та географія». 2012. № 45. С. 26.

Makhno also distanced himself from the term «bandit», stating that it was Bolshevik slander repeated by the Polish press.⁵⁵

The Czechoslovak Ministry of Foreign Affairs took Makhno's request seriously. His activities in Poland were monitored by the Embassy in Warsaw until 1924. The Czechoslovakian authorities sought to acquaint themselves with the character of Makhno and his activities, and to do so relied on the Polish press. Polish bias meant coverage was negative. The political reports addressed to the Foreign Ministry described Makhno as a «bogyman» of the landowners, who was hated by Jews and Christians: «Makhno was of an exuberant and unbridled nature, sowing death and fire for many years, proclaiming that what he was already doing was necessary [...] to bring about anarchy».⁵⁶ Officially, Czechoslovakia did not grant Makhno's request for permission to come.⁵⁷ No documents expressly state the reasons, but events in the following two years played a large role in why Makhno did not ultimately come to Czechoslovakia.

Moreover, given the content of the political reports from the Embassy in Warsaw, it is probably certain that Makhno would not have been allowed to stay in the country. In 1924, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs published a pamphlet outlining several principles for providing refuge to emigrants in Czechoslovakia: 1) Assistance is provided based on the applicant's necessity; 2) Russian Aid Operation is not only to nourish, but mainly to lead to intellectual work for the benefit of their nation; 3) Assistance is to be rendered without regard to the political, religious or national affiliation of the applicant; 4) Russian Aid Operation must not be abused for

⁵⁵ AMZV. F. II. sekce 1918–39 – JMENNÁ SPISOVNÁ. K.Č. 45. Spis č.j. 000743/II/24 ze dne 02.01.1924 .

⁵⁶ AMZV. F. II. sekce 1918–39 – JMENNÁ SPISOVNÁ. K.Č. 45. Spis č.j. 079265/II/24 ze dne 10.05.1924.

⁵⁷ Národní archiv ČR (hereinafter NA ČR). F. MZV-RPA. Inv. č. 98. K.č. 227.