

01 February 2022

Director of Education
Brendan Browne
80 Sheppard Ave E
Toronto Ontario

**Subject: TO PROCLAIM KATYN MASSACRE AND SMOLENSK AIR DISASTER
COMMEMORATION DAY IN ALL TORONTO CATHOLIC DISTRICT SCHOOL
BOARD (TCDSB) SCHOOLS ON APRIL 10th, 2022 AND EVERY YEAR
THEREAFTER**

Dear Mr. Browne,

I am writing this letter in support of the subject initiative. I am doing so within my authority as Chair/Vice Chair of several Polish organizations and thus I have chosen to consolidate my intervention within a single letter to you. The organizations that I represent are:

Chair of Copernicus Lodge Long Term Care Home
Chair of Polish Studies at University of Toronto
Vice-Chair of the Warsaw-Toronto Friendship Committee

I am also a retired Infantry Lieutenant-Colonel; and,
The former Member of Parliament for Etobicoke Centre

I am the son of Polish parents who, like the entire Polish nation and its people was consumed by the Second World War from its very first day. My father was a soldier who survived the gulag (my grandfather did not) and narrowly escaped his fate at Katyn where many of his comrades were murdered on Stalin's orders. My mother was as a teen taken to Nazi Germany as forced labour and like many women of her generation suffered from lifelong and at times, crippling trauma. The kinds of traumas we talk about today in relation to PTSD and more personal traumas. In generations past these were not discussed but suppressed. However, today there is open dialogue, and the recent Bell Let's Talk Day is a perfect example of that.

The causes of these mental and physical scars weren't just a grab for territory, dominance and assimilation. It was also racially motivated by Nazi Germany believing in their superiority and the Soviets on the other side applying a brutal political communist doctrine that crushed and destroyed any individuality, free thought or action. Stalin was ruthless to all and attempted to destroy all resistance through the murder of Polish leadership and intelligentsia. This led to Katyn and other massacres. It was also a bizarrely motivated attempt to eliminate from history the defeat of the Bolshevik Red Army to the Polish Forces in the Polish-Russo War of 1920.

Many of our veterans and parents have passed and some presently reside in Copernicus Lodge and other seniors' homes. Copernicus is in the catchment area of your schools and many children there are the grandchildren or great grandchildren of these seniors. It is important to share

historical truth and accuracy especially from primary sources that were there. This also helps children bond with their grandparents by understanding their journeys.

The teaching of these tragedies in your schools educates children, all children, about a very difficult time in history for the world. This history was captured in Timothy Snyder's book Bloodlands about this tragic region. If children cannot understand the past, they most certainly will not be able to relate to present events.

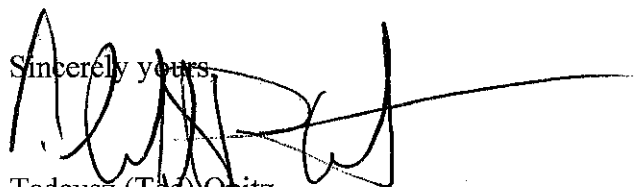
For example, the current conflict in Ukraine has a direct linkage not only to World War II and the fall of the Soviet Union, but centuries back to the birth of the Russian empire which was in fact Kyiv based or Kievan Rus. When I served in Bosnia, many of the combatants I spoke to as well as civilians on all sides, cited centuries old conflicts as justification for present day actions.

The Polish air crash that killed President Kaczynski and his wife and many of Poland's elite, occurred as a result of their travelling to Smolensk on the 70th anniversary of the Katyn massacre. Rather than return the wreckage of the aircraft so an investigation could determine the cause, Vladimir Putin has used it to taunt the Polish people and has caused this to be unresolved and closure to be impossible for Poland.

These events are part of a broader historical tapestry that in an academic and dispassionate context will help students understand that history is a series of connecting points. To understand and study past events and motivations of leaders and nations, only helps develop critical thinking skills that students will rely on later in other disciplines and situations outside of the classroom.

To study and understand past social injustice, discrimination and authoritarianism in other countries involving other people and races will provide tools for students to examine social issues of the day in this country and critically assess those issues and their root causes.

I hope that the Board of Trustees will take my intervention into account and approve the Proclamation mentioned above.

Sincerely yours,

Tadeusz (Ted) Opitz
LCol (ret'd)

cc. Consul-General of The Republic of Poland in Toronto, Magdalena Pszczolkowska
Teresa Lubinski, School Trustee Parkdale High-Park and Etobicoke-Lakeshore