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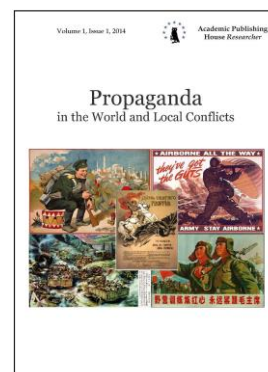
Published in the Slovak Republic
Propaganda in the World and Local Conflicts
Has been issued since 2014.

ISSN 2500-1078

E-ISSN 2500-3712

2017, 4(2): 110-116

DOI: 10.13187/pwlc.2017.2.110

www.ejournal47.com

Krasnodar Open Trials of the 1960s: Mediatization of the Topic of Punishment for War Crimes in the Context of the Foreign Policy of the USSR

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Abstract

The article deals with the mediatization processes that accompanied the trials of collaborators in the USSR. As an example, open courts were held in Krasnodar in 1962, 1963, 1965. Content-analytical research publications in the regional newspaper *Sovetskaya Kuban* allowed to establish general trends of these processes, largely related to the foreign policy context.

The campaign to cover the Krasnodar processes in 1962–1965 in the local periodical press is systematic and consistent. But in the central press courts received minimal coverage. It can be concluded that mediation was more aimed at Soviet citizens. Thus, the population was explained the difference in approaches to war criminals in the USSR and the capitalist West, the cardinal difference between the two socio-political systems.

Keywords: The Soviet Union, open trials of the 1960s, crimes, fascist invaders, collaborators, Soviet newspapers, mediatization, international politics, revanchism, content analysis.

1. Introduction

The wave of open trials of German fascist invaders and their accomplices in the USSR, which started with the Krasnodar process July 14–17, 1943, is now referred to using the symbolic title “Soviet Nuremberg.” A number of researchers with good reason believe that these court proceedings that took place in the Soviet Union for several decades, were overshadowed by the Nuremberg Tribunal (Astashkin, 2015: 98). It is also obvious that the open trials that took place in the period long after the war have been much less comprehensively studied than those that swept the country in the war and first post-war years (Lebedeva, 1975; Tazhidinova, 2016).

The Krasnodar open trial of 1943 was not a single event in the history of the region, but continued with a series of new court proceedings over collaborators (March 5-7, 1959, July 16-24, 1962, October 10-24, 1963; June 1-8, 1965, 1974) (Stepanenko, 2010: 161-165). In this connection, it is important to analyze the links between these activities (their circumstances, progress, decisions, social effects). Pursuing this line of action, we explored three high-profile processes that took place in Krasnodar in the 1960s. We believe they have certain common features and interrelate, largely due to the foreign policy context. Identifying goals and techniques of selective mediatization makes this commonality more transparent (Sharonov, 2008, 2008: 235-236).

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Regarding extent to which the subject is studied, there are several reasons why the course and results of the Soviet Nuremberg failed to attract much attention from the Russian historical community for a long time. This failure can be explained by scarce and mainly similar sources, as well as by the ideological factor which made it impossible to deliver a balanced picture of collaborationism issues. The study of the Krasnodar processes was not an exception from this perspective. Although these processes were covered in the paper by G.S. Stepanenko (Stepanenko, 2010: 164–165), which focused on the legal aspect of the subject, but this work is descriptive and fails to provide deep insights into the problem.

As for foreign scholars, the range of the issues raised by the Krasnodar tribunals was specifically addressed by I. Bourtman (Bourtman, 2008) and V. Voisen (Voisen, 2012). A particularly valuable source is the paper by a French researcher Vanessa Voisin, which analyzes the Krasnodar trial of nine executioners from Sonderkommando 10-a (October 1963) on the basis of a forty-minute documentary by L. Mazrukho (director) and L. Ginzburg (screenwriter) “In the Name of the Living” (Vo Imya Zhivykh).

2. Materials and methods

The study into propaganda materials on trials of war criminals makes an integrated use of the content analysis of Soviet media texts. The units of analysis in our study included articles, reports, news items in the newspaper *Sovetskaya Kuban*, a printed medium of the Krasnodar Territory and City Committees of the CPSU, the Council of Working People's Deputies for the Krasnodar Territory, which spotlight the progression and outcome of open trials held in Krasnodar in the 1960s (July 16–24, 1962, October 10–24, 1963, June 1–8, 1965). Additionally, the study used individual materials from the central press (from the newspapers *Pravda* and *Izvestia*).

The methodological foundation of the study was formed by the principles of objectivity and historicism, which imply an unbiased approach to the analysis of problems under review and a critical attitude to sources, as well as mean considering phenomena in the corresponding historical environment. The comparative and historical method helped compare the trials of war criminals, held in different historical periods.

3. Results and discussion

The values of the above paper by V. Voisin include the author's consideration of the international context which was sensitive to the fact that the Soviet Union resumed the widely publicized proceedings against collaborators in the early 1960s. The situation of the Cold War (still fresh memories of the Berlin Crisis of 1961 and the Caribbean crisis of 1962) fuelled the confrontation between the USSR and nations of the capitalist West and raised the propaganda fever pitch on both sides. Voisin notes: “The persecution and conviction of Nazi criminals comes to the forefront of the political agenda, as both camps struggle to prove that they are true to international law and champion the noblest humanistic principles. In the late 1950's, numerous trials, which were held in the West, of major war criminals demonstrated how cleansing and denazification of the first post-war years were selective and inconsistent. <...> The Soviet authorities were probably concerned about the slow Western justice, or at least used this argument to criticize the capitalist camp.” Referring to the material of Soviet “newsreels or even specially shot documentaries” (about the Krasnodar trial in 1963, Mineralnye Vody trial in 1966, Gomel trial in 1967, and the later trial in Rostov in 1973), Voisin arrives at a conclusion about “a whole campaign, undoubtedly initiated from above” (Voisen, 2012: 153). With other media sources taken into account, we should reflect on what scale this campaign had in the printed periodicals in the USSR in 1962–1965.

On July 16–24, 1962, an open Krasnodar court session convicted participants of punitive operations from the Radom SS squad (six were sentenced to death, and three to 15 years of imprisonment). The newspaper *Sovetskaya Kuban* (recently renamed from *Bolshevik*), which was a printed medium of the Krasnodar Territory and City Committees of the CPSU, the Council of Working People's Deputies for the Krasnodar Territory, covered the process daily. All seven articles were placed on the fourth (last) page of the newspaper in the section “From the courtroom,” and were of a medium size with no authorship indicated. The fact that articles had neither mentions of authors, as well as nor exclamation marks in the headlines or special slogans/calls in their texts,

perhaps added formality to the trial publications – highly emotional presentation of materials on the 1943 trial by the newspaper definitely remained in the war past.

The very titles of the articles are already indicative of the logic of the trial and, at the same time, of the mediatization vector. Here are quotations of the titles: “Butchers brought to justice,” “Chain of atrocities,” “No, this can’t be concealed,” “Traitor changes masters,” “Murderers unmask each other,” “Witnesses make accusations,” “In the name of the people.” Hence, in one way or another, readers were introduced to all phases of the “story” that ended with in court: turning points and trouble of tracking down the traitors by the state security agencies, bringing charges against them (mainly those relating to the crimes in “death camps” in Poland), interrogations of defendants (with particular emphasis on punitive executioners exposing each other), testimony of witnesses, and finally, a verdict.

Based on the selected topic, we should have a closer look at the significant point, and, judging by the place given to it, that is the key message of several of the publications reviewed. It states that “fascist hirelings” (this is the term most often used to denote defendants) did not wait long to change their “masters” after the war, i.e. they were recruited by Americans. For example, an article, devoted entirely to the guilt of defendant N.F. Pashchenko, depicts his biography as a traitor: captivity and enlisting in Hitler's SS troops, crimes in Majdanek and Treblinka, service in Vlasov's Russian Liberation Army, escape to the US occupation zone, life in the FRG, recruitment by the US intelligence agency and, finally, return to his native Tuapse region with the purpose of carrying on espionage activities ([Sovetskaja Kuban', 1962: July 20](#)). Despite its title, the article “Witnesses make accusations” devotes 2/3 of its content to the disclosure of methods of recruiting personnel from among Nazis and their accomplices (“handouts from the so-called “Tolstoy Foundation,” blackmail, inebriation, bribery, and murders). A Cold War style summary concludes: “Oversees atomic scientists are brandishing their weapons again, threatening humanity with an even more terrible war” ([Sovetskaja Kuban', 1962: July 22](#)).

The publications on the Krasnodar legal process of 1962 attached an important foreign policy emphasis as they described how fascist criminals “safely live in the Federative Republic of Germany, in other capitalist countries, enjoying every kind of support from certain circles.” “The executioners who killed US citizens are now recruited by American intelligence,” one of the articles writes with indignation. “Imperialists are training these thugs for new mass crimes and murders” ([Sovetskaja Kuban', 1962: July 17](#)).

At the turn of 1963, the Directorate of the Committee for State Security for the Krasnodar Territory arrested another nine people in various cities across the USSR. On October 10–24, 1963, cases charging their punitive activities and personal participation in killings of civilians were heard by the Military Tribunal of the North Caucasian Military District in Krasnodar. All the accused served as punitive executioners in Sonderkommando SS-10a, later renamed as the “Caucasian Company.” The court examined their crimes committed not only in numerous settlements in the Kuban region, but also in the Crimea, Rostov region, Belarus, Poland, and Yugoslavia. Eight defendants were sentenced to death, one – to 15 years in maximum security correctional camp.

For two weeks, while the trial proceeded, the newspaper *Sovetskaya Kuban* covered it regularly every 2 days, and this means that it published seven articles in total as it was the case in the Krasnodar process of 1962. They were still located on the last page of the issues in the “From the courtroom” section, but, what is noteworthy, they had authors, and this added to the emotional tone of voice used in the texts (2 of 7 articles had even exclamation marks in their headlines). The authors were the newspaper's special correspondents R. Zakiev and Ch. Shakhmaliev. On the other hand, it immediately strikes that the headlines of the articles on the 1963 trial are very similar to those that appeared in the publications on the 1962 process (“Monsters brought to justice,” “Witnesses brand murderers”), and the final article on the outcome of the tribunal had a title identical to the final article published last year – “In the name of the people.”

In the context of our subject, it is essential that the 1963 articles continued the line aimed to expose the unlawful protection by Europe and the US of Nazi criminals. Zakiev with indignation ascertains that many Sonderkommando SS-10-a leaders escaped retaliation and “are still alive under the wing of the Bonn revanchists,” meaning Kurt Christmann, Heinrich Goertz, and SS officers infamous for their crimes in the Kuban ([Sovetskaja Kuban', 1963: October 11](#)). We should note that although Zakiev and Shakhmaliev make almost no references to the Krasnodar process 20 years ago, it is this motif of the Nazis’ escape from just retribution that is most difficult to

accept. After all, journalists, who worked at the Krasnodar trial in 1943, wrote that collaborators' leaders and masterminds Christmann, Goertz and others were invisibly present among those sitting in the prisoners' dock, and that in Krasnodar in July 1943 international justice, in a sense, began to be done for their crimes. This incomplete act of justice, largely caused by the international situation that existed at the time, is highlighted by one of the state prosecutors. His words are cited by the article that sums up the results of the tribunal: "The significance of this process implies that, by uncovering the specific guilt of the accused and bringing fascist atrocities back to memory, it is a different, yet another trial over fascism, over the ideology and practice of imperialism, which were embodied in Hitler's outrages. The materials of this process shall once again remind everyone of the bestial face of German imperialism, the face that, to the fullest extent, although under a new disguise, is preserved by the Bonn Bundeswehr. The trial of the executioners reveals the need to enhance vigilance against imperialist intrigues, stay constantly alert and tirelessly build up the power and defense capacity of our Motherland and the entire socialist camp" (*Sovetskaja Kuban'*, 1963: October 26).

The open trial of 1965, which was held at the Cultural Center of the Krasnodar Electrical Measuring Instruments Plant June 1–8, was as systematically covered by *Sovetskaya Kuban* as the previous ones. Eight publications followed one another in the eight issues of the newspaper; all of them were located in the "From the courtroom" section on the 4th (last) page, and their authors invariably were correspondents working in tandem, this time I. Mutovin and A. Marakushev. If we compare it with the 1962–1963 experience, the headlines of the articles, spotlighting the 1965 process, look more emotional and verbose, but, on the other hand, there were again some coincidences in headlines.

The opening article "Ashes of Victims Cries to the Hearts of the Living" even got ahead of the process, as it was published on the day it started. Although it already names the six accomplices, who are to face the dock, but the central place is given to exposing the SS men "who stood behind their backs," and who "will be invisibly present [there] to be brought to justice" (*Sovetskaja Kuban'*, 1965: June 1). As a reminder, this image was once captured by a *Pravda* correspondent, Elena Kononenko, who worked at the Krasnodar process in 1943, and was then employed by another Moscow journalist Martyn Merzhanov (*Tazhidinova*, 2016: 84). Since over the past 2 decades the problem of bringing German war criminals to justice remained on the table, it became the leitmotif of the first article on the Krasnodar process in 1965. This publication spared only few words about accomplices and complicity. There is little doubt that its purport was aimed against a more immediate enemy. "Those present at the trial will once again make sure that fascism has been crushed, but not finished off – it has crawled to the West and is now emerging in a new guise – revanchism," predicted Mutovin and Marakushev (*Sovetskaja Kuban'*, 1965: June 1).

Sovetskaya Kuban then published a series of articles with variations in headlines already highlighted by us in the 1962-1963 mediatization: "Executioners in the dock," "Their doings are inexcusable," "Chain of crimes," "Face to face," "Murderers not to escape justice," "Trial of human conscience has no mercy," "Retribution to executioners." These publications enable us to formulate an idea of the process and its characteristic features.

There was less than half a kilometer between the Cultural Center, where the tribunal met, and the place of mass killings of the civilian population of Krasnodar in the period of its occupation (August 9, 1942 – February 12, 1943), and the authors of articles found this fact to be both symbolic and logical. The court sessions were attended by workers of Krasnodar enterprises, university students, doctors, teachers, and collective farmers. Journalists point out that all eight hundred seats available in the Center were taken, and there was not enough room in the hall for everyone who wanted to be present at the legal process. Representatives of the teams in which three of the six defendants worked also came to the open trial. There were participants of the Great Patriotic War, who lived in the Kuban, in the hall as well as prisoners of the "death camps" – Buchenwald, Auschwitz, Sobibor, and Belzec – who specifically came for the purpose. According to the article "Face to face," 44 witnesses were summoned to the court, including citizens of the Polish People's Republic, former prisoners of fascist concentration camps (*Sovetskaja Kuban'*, 1965: June 5). The court of the military tribunal of the North Caucasus Military District was chaired by Major General of Justice G.T. Nafikov. The publications also mention prosecutors for the community: driver A. P. Sharov, a Krasnodar resident who survived Auschwitz, a school teacher from Yeisk S. Ye. Kravtsov, a former Buchenwald prisoner, and agronomist at one of the Kuban state farms

N. V. Makarenko, who prosecuted defendant V.E. Podenok on behalf of people living the Podgornaya village) (*Sovetskaja Kuban'*, 1965: June 1; June 8).

The description of those who were “behind the barrier” (in the dock), is concise and devoid of any sympathy. “They are hiding their eyes from people, hunching and sinking their head in their shoulders. No, they do not have the appearance of monsters. Those who do not know them may at first think that these are meek, “ordinary” people. But this impression is deceptive,” journalists wrote (*Sovetskaja Kuban'*, 1965: June 2). They also drew the audience's attention to the motives that inspired them to betray their Motherland and serve the invaders, and offered for them quite a categorical formulation: “villainy and base considerations,” “greed and cowardice,” “mindset of murderers,” “self-love” (*Sovetskaja Kuban'*, 1965: June 2; June 3; June 5).

As in the Krasnodar process of 1943, no pictures of the defendants (or caricatures of them) were published. However, the newspaper still depicted some features of the collaborators' appearance. “The first one is Matvienko N.G. who is tentatively coming up to the microphone. A short man of 43. He has a grim cheekbone face and narrow, dull eyes. He hides his long hands behind his back. These hands does not belong to a worker, but to an executioner. They are stained with human blood” – this was how the journalists described the beginning of the interrogation procedure that was started by the Military Tribunal of the North Caucasus Military District on June 2. From the authors' perspective, Matvienko deliberately spoke monotonously and dwelt on inessential details so as to try to add a normal view and credibility to the facts of his career with Germans. Journalists quoted one of the passages slipped in his speech: “There was a good time when I took part in the killing of two hundred people near Lublin” (*Sovetskaja Kuban'*, 1965: June 3). While the authors of the article call Matvienko “a miserable figure”, they classify Podenok as “the most disgusting figure of this sinister six.” At the same time, they are particularly struck by the fact that Podenok's three brothers served in the Red Army during the Great Patriotic War, and the fourth brother was a fighter in a guerilla party (*Sovetskaja Kuban'*, 1965: June 8).

An analysis of the texts in the articles reveals that the 1965 trial repeated an already familiar situation when the guilt of specific defendants “was overshadowed” by the common guilt of all participants in the Hitler terror operations. This is evidenced by the following quotes: “10,000 people were killed with the participation of Matvienko”; “Zaitsev took part in gassing five hundred thousand people” (*Sovetskaja Kuban'*, 1965: June 3; June 8). Additionally, the journalists themselves quite haphazardly detailed the words that they heard at the trial. In our opinion, the staggering information on the scale of killings was sometimes not consistently and professionally mixed with “stories” about the practices adopted by German “executioners,” which were no directly related to the cases of the six defendants. As an illustration, here is an excerpt from the final and the largest article covering the process: “Nazis of the Third Reich killed 12 million people. They killed in cold blood with the rapture of sadists. In their experiments, German fascist doctors forced inmates of concentration camps to drink sea water until they went crazy. In Auschwitz, they forced a father to drown his son” (*Sovetskaja Kuban'*, 1965: June 8).

The unprofessional way that was used to present the information on the process did not prevent the article from accomplishing the task that the mediatization was evidently aimed at in the first place. It appears that the above welter even contributed to it because fanned the flames of sentiments not against “six” specific collaborators (in fact, “pawns” in the policy of terror carried out by the Hitlerites), but in relation to the more salient figures involved in the large-scale case of massacres of civilian population during World War II. The first article, which opened the coverage of the 1965 Krasnodar process, already underlined the fact that SS executioners had escaped to West Germany, received asylum there and in other countries, such as Chile, and changed “helmets to hats” (*Sovetskaja Kuban'*, 1965: June 1).

In Mutovin and Marakushev's subsequent articles, the theme of the change of “masters” by criminals and the denunciation of revanchism actually became a leading line. Conclusions of this kind are particularly visible in the large final publication that summarizes the process results just before sentences were pronounced (*Sovetskaja Kuban'*, 1965: June 8). In this publication, the authors invite readers to discuss “the lessons learned from the process.” To this end, they emphasize over and over again that the solemn declarations on the compulsory punishment of all Nazi criminals, made by leaders of the anti-Hitler coalition during World War II, “were at variance with reality.” To confirm this, they provide a number of specific examples showing that some SS men suffered no punishment at all but moreover led a prosperous life in the West, and even serve

in American and West German intelligence, in other words, they are engaged in activities hostile to the USSR ([Sovetskaja Kuban', 1965: June 8](#)).

4. Conclusion

Thus, it is necessary to admit that although the coverage of the Krasnodar processes in 1962–1965 by the local periodical press was not a high-profile campaign (it is absolutely impossible to compare it with the scale and emotional intensity of the presentation of the Krasnodar process in 1943), it was systematic and consistent. Speaking of the central press, the response was minutest here. For example, *Izvestia* did not react to these events at all. A single article in *Pravda* summed up the results of the 1963 tribunal in detail (“34 volumes, more than 9,000 pages!”), including personal biographical data of collaborators and caustic comments on “Bonn revanchists,” but was modestly located on the very last page of the issue ([Pravda, 1963: October 25](#)). The situation was repeated in 1965, when *Pravda* highlighted the new Krasnodar process only in one publication (and again it was placed on the last page of the issue). The material “Retribution comes,” the supplied a detailed account of the beginning of the process received “from Krasnodar by phone,” and, characteristically, the information on the guilt of the defendants still lacked specificity. On the other hand, it is noteworthy that along with the names of the six defendants, it named nine SS officers who “...following the defeat of Germany, fled to the Federal Republic of Germany and settled down under the wing of the Bonn authorities.” The closing part of *Pravda*'s article promises an inevitable and “just retribution” exactly to these war criminals ([Pravda, 1965: June 2](#)).

As a result, in a comparative perspective, we lean towards a conclusion that the information message implied by the Krasnodar processes of 1962–1965 was much more targeted at Soviet people (raising their awareness about the different approaches to war criminals, taken in the USSR and in the capitalist West, which once again shows the fundamental discrepancy between the two systems) rather than sought to influence the international community. It is this aspect that can be viewed as a key feature distinguishing the objectives of the mediatization that accompanied the Krasnodar Tribunal of 1943.

On the other hand, it is significant that the account of the 1962–1965 processes in *Sovetskaya Kuban* was always printed on the last page of the newspaper, which was mainly devoted to the “International Life” section. It means that articles on tribunals over traitors to the Soviet homeland were virtually surrounded by information on the life abroad, and in some cases, were literally wedged into it. The issue of collaborationism, as it were, was communicated “abroad” in such a sophisticated manner. Considering the criticism of Western imperialists, which was expressed by almost half of the articles on the trials, published by *Sovetskaya Kuban*, the population had increasingly less reasons to perceive this problem as an internal issue.

5. Acknowledgements

The study is carried out with the financial support of the Russian Foundation for Basic Research as part of the project No. 16-21-08001a(m) “Soviet trials of war criminals in 1943–1991: goals, functions and effects of selective mediatization”.

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