

# **“Loyalties of the Warsaw Pact Seem To Live Forever”**

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Despite many years of attempts, historians working on the Parallel History Project on NATO and the Warsaw Pact (referred to as PHP) have not gained access to Polish military archives. The situation is due to a still valid agreement concluded among the countries of the defunct Warsaw Pact. In early 1999, Vojtech Mastny – an American historian of Czech origin – requested the Polish minister of defense, Janusz Onyszkiewicz, to give selected Polish historians access to some military documents. He did not expect that his request would cause so many perturbations. Poland was about to become a NATO member, and professor Mastny expected that the country would be glad to join the research project. The goal of the program is to declassify, present and evaluate the documents of the former Pact – which no longer are important from the operational standpoint, and which could reveal at least part of the truth on the role of individual members.

However, the response to Mastny's letter left no doubts. Colonel Porajski from the General Headquarters wrote that Poland may not reveal them, on the basis of an agreement signed in 1991, between members of the Pact. It sets forth that documents received from the Joint Command of the Warsaw Pact may not be provided to third parties and published. Col. Porajski explained that if Poland breached this agreement, it could lose its international credibility. Mastny did not give up easily. He used his contacts to pressure the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Finally this year he sent another official request to the Minister of Defense. This time the professor used the argument of a different historical situation. Poland has already become a NATO member, and one of the closest allies of the USA during the Iraqi campaign. These documents, insisted Mastny, should be revealed and made available for historical research. After all, former members of the Warsaw Pact became NATO members. He said also that the inaccessibility of Polish archives is in sharp contrast with the full availability of similar German or Czech archives. Janusz Onyszkiewicz remembers professor Mastny and his request. He explains that the "classified" status cannot be lifted, because the agreement is an international contract, and should not be ignored. Polish historians say the reason may be different. The refusal could be based on "army loyalty" towards those who signed the various documents of the Warsaw Pact, and who could be seriously compromised if these documents were revealed, says professor Andrzej Paczkowski. He adds that the request of professor Mastny could be fulfilled, and the Polish army would not be harmed by it, as Mastny asks for documents of a rather political nature. Paczkowski says

also that the army tightly guards the access to archival materials, and the civil management of the defense ministry does not exert enough control to overcome this situation. Polish historians sometimes manage to gain access to army archives, even the classified ones, but the methods they use are often informal. However, they managed to uncover some of the "tricks" applied by army archivists not to reveal documents older than 30 years – older documents are often catalogued together with ones which are less than 30 years old, and thus the whole collection becomes inaccessible. Janusz Onyszkiewicz admits that the current situation in Poland is different than in 1989, so the access to military documents from pre-1989 should be larger. However, immediate access to such a large scope of documents as professor Mastny requested is not probable. Excessive opening of military archives is not good for anybody, as illustrated by the example of former minister of defense, Bronislaw Komorowski. Near the end of his term, in 2001, he decided to declassify military documents regarding the events of August 1980. The documents were revealed and presented during a press conference. As a result, the Military Intelligence Service started proceedings against the minister himself. The historians from PHP will not receive the documents they requested. For this reason, Poland was one of the worst represented countries during an international conference of the PHP, held in Norway this summer.