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Polish Problems with Genocide According to Rafał Lemkin

Rafał (Raphael) Lemkin is currently the best-known Polish lawyer, whose name appears invariably as a point of departure for international discussions about genocide. He is the author of *The German New Order in Poland* and in 1944 published *Axis Rule in Occupied Europe*, containing the term: “genocide”. At the time of the Nuremberg Trial Lemkin acted as adviser to United States Supreme Court Justice Robert H. Jackson. Subsequently, he worked on devising an act of law that would define the principles of penalising the crime of genocide. On 9 December 1948 the United Nations General Assembly adopted the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide.

In Poland the revival of interest in Lemkin has its positive and negative sides. The former undoubtedly include changing or rather initiating an alteration of a situation embarrassing or outright insulting for Poland, namely, when Polish-language versions of the above-mentioned books about the Axis occupation were not available and Lemkin was not mentioned in assorted studies. The latter aspect involves his *sui generis* sacralisation and elevation, hindering a critical discussion about his achievements, since such a debate could be interpreted as questioning them. This article endeavours to examine the conception of genocide from the viewpoint of an historian, and reflects on the extent to which it could become an instrument of historical analysis.