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## POLES AS THE HEADS OF CHEKA/NKVD

### POLACY NA CZELE CZEKI-NKWD

**Abstract:** The Author presents the circumstances of the establishment of the political police (CheKa, then NKVD) in Russia as soon as the Bolsheviks took power in 1917. Its creator and first head was Felix Edmundovich Dzerzhinsky, a Bolshevik of Polish descent. He also gave it the character of an institution of terror. After Dzerzhinsky's death (1926), Vyacheslav Rudolfovich Menzhinsky, also of Polish descent, took over as its second head in a row. After his death (1934), the next head was Genrikh (Henryk) Grigoryevich Yagoda, a Polish Jew from the city of Łódź. It was during his time that the great Stalinist terror began.

**Keywords:** beginnings of NKVD, Dzerzhinsky, Menzhinsky, Yagoda

**Streszczenie:** Autor prezentuje okoliczności utworzenia policji politycznej (CzeKa, potem NKWD) w Rosji zaraz po przejęciu władzy przez bolszewików w 1917 roku. Twórcą i jej pierwszym szefem był polskiego pochodzenia bolszewik Feliks Edmundowicz Dzierżyński. To on nadał jej charakter instytucji stosującej terror. Po śmierci Dzierżyńskiego (1926) drugim z kolei szefem był też polskiego pochodzenia Wiaczesław Rudolfowicz Mienżynski, zaś po jego śmierci (1934) szefem został Gienrich (Henryk) Grigorjewicz Jagoda, polski Żyd pochodzący z miasta Łodzi. To za jego czasów rozpoczął się wielki terror stalinowski.

**Słowa kluczowe:** początki NKWD, Dzierżyński, Mienżynski, Jagoda

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On 20/7 December 1917, the Bolshevik government, i.e. the Council of People's Commissars [CPC], made a decision to establish a state security authority<sup>1</sup>. It was named the 'Extraordinary Commission for Combating Counter-Revolution, Profiteering and Crimes (from August 1918, the All-Russian Extraordinary Commission...)<sup>2</sup>, and hence the popular abbreviation: Cherezvychayka, or even a shorter one: CheKa. As Dzerzhinsky later wrote, 'the establishment of VChK coincided with the dissolution of the Petrograd Revolutionary Committee; the VChK was thus created when there was no authority to fight counter-revolution, sabotage and profiteering'<sup>3</sup>. CheKa was an authority of the government<sup>4</sup>, loosely linked to the People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs (NKVD<sup>5</sup>).

For a long time, CheKa's leadership was largely non-Russian. Felix Dzerzhinsky, its creator and first head – and a legend of Soviet security services – was of Polish descent. From the beginning, Dzerzhinsky's closest co-workers were the Latvians Mārtins Lācis as well as Jēkabs Peterss and Viktor Kingisepp. In particular, Lācis was the first head of the Moscow branch of CheKa after the country's capital city had been moved to Moscow (February 1918). The Latvian branch of the Chekists was the most reliable unit of the Soviet security authorities at that time<sup>6</sup>. As put by an eyewitness to the Kronstadt sailors' rebellion (1921), 'now Latvians become praetorians' of the Bolsheviks<sup>7</sup>. The first commander-in-chief of the Red Army was Jukums Vācētis, also a Latvian. Those of Polish descent included Stanisław Skulski-Mertens, Stanisław Messing and Stanisław Redens. Vyacheslav Menzhinsky, who followed Dzerzhinsky as the second head of the security service, also had Polish roots. The leadership of the early period included Polish Jews: Henryk (Genrikh) Yagoda (from Łódź), the third head of the security service in a row, and Iosif Unshlikht (from Mława). Mikhail Trilisser and Moisei Uritsky also were Jews. In general, Jews as a group were not only

<sup>1</sup> At this point, I will rely mainly on my findings: A. Lityński, *Prawo Rosji i ZSRR 1917–1991, czyli historia wszechzwiązkowego komunistycznego prawa (bolszewików). Krótki kurs [Law of Russia and the USSR 1917–1991, or the History of All-Union Communist Law (of Bolsheviks). A Short Course]*, 3rd ed., Warszawa 2017.

<sup>2</sup> Чрезвычайная Комиссия по Борьбе с Контрреволюцией, Спекуляцией и Преступлениями – Chrezvychaynaya Komissiya po Borbe s Kонтrevolyutsiyey, Spekulyatsiyey i Prestupleniyami. That was its exact name, albeit it tends to be slightly distorted in many publications. See the documents of that time in: *История законодательства СССР и РСФСР по уголовному процессу и организации суда и прокуратуры 1917–1954 гг. Сборник документов*, (ред.) С.А. Голунский, Москва 1955, pp. 64, 185.

<sup>3</sup> F. Dzierżyński, *Pisma wybrane [Selected Writings]*, Warszawa 1951, p. 227.

<sup>4</sup> The text in: *История законодательства СССР...*, p. 64; В.А. Иванов, [in:] *Сорок лет советского права 1917–1957*, vol. 1, *Период строительства социализма*, (ред.) О.С. Иоффе, Ленинград 1957, pp. 567–568; Л.А. Николаева, Г.И. Петров, В.Д. Сорокин, [in:] *Сорок лет...*, vol. 1, p. 132.

<sup>5</sup> Народный Комиссариат Внутренних Дел – Narodnyi Komissariat Vnutrennykh Del = NKVD.

<sup>6</sup> B. Lewickij, *Terror i rewolucja [Terror and Revolution]*, transl. by A. Palicki, Wrocław 1990, pp. 18–19, 33; D. Rayfield, *Stalin i jego oprawcy [Stalin and His Hangmen]*, transl. by S. Kędzierski and E. Skórska, Warszawa 2009, p. 77. The latter claims that in 1917, three-fourths of Cherezvychayka's headquarters were Latvians.

<sup>7</sup> T. Parczewski, *Pamiętniki gubernatora Kronsztadu [Memoirs of the Governor of Kronstadt]*, compiled by T. Bohun, Warszawa 2006, p. 218.

numerous<sup>8</sup> but also occupied high positions in the structures of the coercive authorities: from Lev Davidovich Trotsky (Bronstein) to I. Unshlikht, Dzerzhinsky's right-hand man, to M. Trilisser and M. Uritsky (this is by no means an exhaustive list). It was similar in the party structures. In 1921, apart from Lenin and Stalin, the Political Bureau included Jews: Trotsky, Lev Kamenev and Grigory Zinoviev. Yakov Sverdlov, in turn, became the formal head of state, following Kamenev. The strong connection between the Jewish population and the Bolsheviks resulted from the traditional Russian anti-Semitism<sup>9</sup>. One needs to remember the drastic discrimination against the Jewish population in the times of tsars in Russia, the so-called Pale of Settlement, pogroms, and Jews not being allowed to go to schools and pursue certain activities. The 'Polish period' in the history of CheKa/NKVD ended with the end of Yagoda's rule as the head of the ministry<sup>10</sup>.

The creator and then an eternal legend of Soviet security services was, obviously, Felix Edmundovich Dzerzhinsky. Although he is generally a well-known figure, he still deserves a closer look. Felix was born on 11 September 1877 in Oziembłowo (later Dzerzhinovo) in the Vilna Governorate into a very patriotic, petty-noble family<sup>11</sup>. He was one of the eight children of Edmund and Helena née Januszewska, an educated woman. Felix always maintained the warmest relationship with his sister Aldona, who married Gedymin Bułhak, the co-owner of the Mickiewicz estate. She had four children. Felix would happily visit the Bułhaks and correspond with them. Aldona's son, Antoni Jerzy Bułhak, was one of Marshal Józef Piłsudski's adjutants, fought in the Bolshevik-Polish war and was awarded the Virtuti Militari cross. He married (1923) Piłsudski's niece, Wanda Juchniewiczówna, and lived with her for some time in Sulejówek<sup>12</sup>. The Soviets tried to prepare (1923) an assassination attempt on Józef Piłsudski in Sulejówek, but Felix Dzerzhinsky, as CheKa's head, forbade it – probably because of Piłsudski's guests<sup>13</sup>.

Felix's brother, Kazimierz, married to the Italian Luci Schiatti, made, together with his wife, a considerable contribution to the establishment and activities of the Polish conspiracy during World War II. Luci (Łucja) herself was used by a Ger-

<sup>8</sup> N. Werth, *Związek Sowiecki 1917–1945* [*The Soviet Union 1917–1945*], [in:] K. Persak, Ł. Kamiński (eds.), *Czekiści. Organy bezpieczeństwa w europejskich krajach bloku sowieckiego 1944–1989* [*Chekists. Security Authorities in European Countries of the Soviet Bloc 1944–1989*], Warszawa 2010, p. 28.

<sup>9</sup> See Arno Lustiger, *Czerwona księga. Stalin i Żydzi. Tragiczna historia Żydowskiego Komitetu Antyfaszystowskiego i radzieckich Żydów* [*Stalin and the Jews: The Red Book. The Tragedy of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee and the Soviet Jews*], transl. by E. Kazimierczak and W. Leder, Warszawa 2004, p. 70 and *passim*.

<sup>10</sup> N. Iwanow, *Zapomniane ludobójstwo. Polacy w państwie Stalina. „Operacja polska” 1937–1938* [*A Forgotten Genocide. Poles in Stalin's State. The 'Polish Operation' 1937–1938*], Kraków 2014, p. 347.

<sup>11</sup> See especially S. Frołow [assisted by A. Niziołek], *Dzierżyński. Miłość i rewolucja* [*Dzerzhinsky. Love and Revolution*], Kraków 2014, pp. 24 et seq.; J. Ochmański, *Feliks Dzierżyński* [*Felix Dzerzhinsky*], Wrocław-Warszawa-Kraków-Gdańsk-Łódź 1987, pp. 8 et seq.

<sup>12</sup> S. Frołow [assisted by A. Niziołek], *Dzierżyński...*, p. 32, see also p. 198.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 147, 193.

man commander's headquarters as a translator, had access to secret information and passed it to members of the resistance movement. They were both executed by shooting for this, and Dzerzhinovo was burned by Germans<sup>14</sup>. Władysław, the youngest of the brothers, graduated in medicine from the University of Moscow and worked in Russia as an outstanding neurosurgeon, even though he was not an enthusiast of the revolution. In 1922, Felix permitted him to come back to Poland. During the war, as a doctor, he cooperated with the Home Army's Łódź unit. Arrested by the Gestapo, he was executed by shooting (20 March 1942)<sup>15</sup>.

Felix attended gymnasium but did not graduate because, at the age of 18, he devoted himself to party work. At the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, the first Lithuanian political parties were being formed. One of the initiators of the creation of the Social Democracy of the Kingdom of Poland and Lithuania (SDKPL) was Felix Dzerzhinsky. SDKPL was part of the Russian Social Democratic Workers' Party (RSDWP) from 1906. In SDKPL, he started cooperating with Rosa Luxemburg, sharing her views denying Polish independence<sup>16</sup>. Felix was arrested and convicted multiple times before 1917. He also escaped from exile many times. Overall, he spent 11 years in prison, exile and *katorga*. He was last sentenced in 1916 to another six years of *katorga* but – released after the February Revolution – did not complete this sentence<sup>17</sup>. In 1917, he was already with the Bolsheviks. He participated in the meeting of the Central Committee (CC) of the RSDWP when a decision was made to prepare an armed uprising. It was at that time that Dzerzhinsky moved for the establishment of a Political Bureau within the Central Committee. The idea was accepted, and, notably, the Bureau operated until 1991<sup>18</sup>. He became a member of the Petrograd Military Revolutionary Committee and of the party centre leading the coup.

Trotsky had a very high opinion of Dzerzhinsky as a revolutionary. 'Dzerzhinsky was absolutely united with the cause. Dzerzhinsky did not think for himself. He did not consider himself a politician, at least during Lenin's lifetime. [...] Dzerzhinsky always required someone's political leadership. For many years, he followed Rosa Luxemburg, collaborating with her in the fight against not only Polish patriotism but also Bolshevism. In 1917, he joined the Bolsheviks.'<sup>19</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Ibidem, pp. 34–35; N. Iwanow, *Ludzie Kremla nad Wisłą. Ideowcy czy zdrajcy?* [*Kremlin's People upon the Vistula. Idealists or Traitors?*], Kraków 2023, p. 147.

<sup>15</sup> S. Frołow [assisted by A. Niziołek], *Dzierżyński...*, p. 35.

<sup>16</sup> R. Bender, s.v. *Dzierżyński Feliks* [*Dzerzhinsky Felix*], [in:] *Encyklopedia „Białych Plam”* [*The Encyclopedia of “Blank Pages”*], vol. V, Radom 2001, p. 180; S. Frołow, *Dzierżyński...*, p. 97.

<sup>17</sup> R. Bender, *Dzierżyński...*, pp. 180–181; L. Mleczin, *Ojcowie terroru, tom I: Dzierżyński, Mienżyński, Jagoda* [*Fathers of Terror, vol. I: Dzerzhinsky, Menzhinsky, Yagoda*], transl. by A. Kędziorek, Warszawa 2003, p. 12.

<sup>18</sup> L. Mleczin, *Ojcowie terroru...*, p. 12.

<sup>19</sup> L. Trocki, *Moje życie. Próba autobiografii* [*My Life: An Attempt at an Autobiography*], approved translation form Russian by J. Barski and S. Łukomski, Warszawa 1930 [reprinted: Warszawa 1990], p. 545.

On 13 July 1920, Dzerzhinsky was summoned to Moscow. The Red Army was entering ethnically Polish territories, and Dzerzhinsky, together with other 'Polish' Bolsheviks, was to head the Polish Office in the CC of the Russian Communist Party (Bolsheviks). The Office also included Julian Marchlewski, doctor of laws, 'the doyen of Polish communism' (as put by Nikołaaj Iwanow), Feliks Kon, Edward Próchniak and Iosif Unshlikht. After further Polish territories were occupied, the Office – as planned – was transformed into the Provisional Polish Revolutionary Committee (TKRP-Polrevkom)<sup>20</sup>. It was headed by Julian Marchlewski, not Dzerzhinsky, who would have evoked bad associations in Poles as the chief of the notorious CheKa. Following Mikhail Tukhachevsky's troops, Polrevkom was moving west. They reached Wyszaków (60 km from the capital city), where a local priest gave them accommodation in the rectory. As soon as 20 August 1920, Wyszaków was taken by the Polish troops of General Józef Haller. Three days later, the field court martial of the 1st Army held a trial *in absentia* and sentenced all members of Polrevkom – as traitors to the homeland – to death<sup>21</sup>. The outstanding writer Stefan Żeromski was present at the trial in Wyszaków as a journalist, which inspired his story *Na probostwie w Wyszakowie* [*At the Rectory in Wyszaków*], known to many generations of Poles. In the territories occupied by the Red Army, Dzerzhinsky, acting with great energy, created regional TKRPs headed by Polish, Jewish and Russian communists (e.g. the head in Łapy was Marcelli Nowotko). Arrests, executions and robberies were carried out. It was then that Dzerzhinsky became known as 'Bloody Felix'. Attempts to create a Soviet rifle regiment against Polish troops from the inhabitants of Białystok and the surrounding area were completely unsuccessful. As a result, Dzerzhinsky sent requests to Moscow for the creation, as soon as possible, of a Polish Red Army made up of 'Polish' communists in Russia so that it could be sent to the frontline against fighting Warsaw. When, in the autumn of 1920, the Polish counteroffensive gained momentum, and the Bolsheviks began to seriously think about the defence of Moscow, this task was entrusted to Dzerzhinsky<sup>22</sup>.

Dzerzhinsky fuelled terror with his orders and by setting shooting quotas. 'An explosion of murderous sadism swept the entire country.'<sup>23</sup> Christopher Andrew and Oleg Gordievsky state that in the years 1917–1921, CheKa probably carried out over 250,000 executions<sup>24</sup>.

<sup>20</sup> See in more detail in, e.g. W. Pobóg-Malinowski, *Najnowsza historia polityczna Polski 1864–1945* [*The Recent Political History of Poland 1864–1945*], vol. II, part 1, London 1956, pp. 297 et seq.; B. Skaradziński, *Polskie lata 1919–1920, t. 2 Sąd Boży* [*The Polish Years 1919–1920, vol. 2 Trial by Ordeal*], Warszawa 1993, pp. 166 et seq.; S. Frołow, *Dzierżyński...*, pp. 211 et seq.; R. Bender, *Dzierżyński...*, p. 184.

<sup>21</sup> S. Frołow, *Dzierżyński...*, p. 215.

<sup>22</sup> R. Bender, *Dzierżyński...*, p. 184.

<sup>23</sup> D. Rayfield, *Stalin i jego oprawcy...*, p. 85.

<sup>24</sup> C. Andrew, O. Gordijewski, *KGB*, transl. by R. Brzeski, Warszawa 1997, p. 64.

## THE POLISH FAMILY LOOKED AT FELIX'S ACTIVITIES WITH HORROR<sup>25</sup>

For years, Dzerzhinsky was closely associated with Lenin, but this changed towards the end of Lenin's life. It was then that Dzerzhinsky moved towards Stalin and gradually allowed the GPU/OGPU apparatus to be used to support the General Secretary. At the end of his life, Dzerzhinsky began to deal more with the economy, largely handing over the OGPU apparatus to his deputy, Henryk Yagoda, who was Stalin's trusted man<sup>26</sup>. Boris Bazhanov believes that 'Dzerzhinsky was always on the side of those who had power'<sup>27</sup>.

As is known, Dzerzhinsky died of a heart attack on 20 July 1926. He was 49 years old. It was Stalin who established the cult of Dzerzhinsky as the brilliant creator of Soviet security authorities and as an unsurpassed model of the struggle for revolution. He was worshipped in an almost sacred manner until the end of the USSR. His wife Sofia worked, first, at the Marx-Engels-Lenin Institute and then at the Comintern's Executive Committee. She lived with her son Jan, daughter-in-law and grandchildren in the Kremlin (until 1958, when the Kremlin remained only a museum). In 1941, Sofia Dzerzhinskaya became the manager of the Tadeusz Kościuszko radio station, which broadcast appeals to Poles during the creation of the Polish National Committee in Moscow. She died in 1968. Jan Dzerzhinsky, her son, died, like his father, of a heart attack at the age of 49<sup>28</sup>.

It must be agreed that 'Cheka was the essence of the Bolshevik system of power, without it and D[zerzhinsky] as its head, the revolution would have faded away'<sup>29</sup>.

Vyacheslav Rudolfovich Menzhinsky, one of Dzerzhinsky's deputies, succeeded him as the head of OGPU. Of all heads of Soviet security services, Menzhinsky was the most unusual figure, seemingly incompatible with the tasks carried out by the political police in a totalitarian system. He was born in 1874 in St. Petersburg into a Russian noble family, but, as for his deeper roots, his father was of Polish descent<sup>30</sup>, and it was his mother who was Russian. Boris Bazhanov simply

<sup>25</sup> Ibidem, p. 186.

<sup>26</sup> Ibidem, pp.185–186; N. Iwanow, *Zapomniane ludobójstwo. Polacy w państwie Stalina...*, p. 347.

<sup>27</sup> B. Bażanow, *Byłem sekretarzem Stalina [I Was Stalin's Secretary]*, published by NOWA, Warszawa 1985, p. 119.

<sup>28</sup> S. Frołow, *Dzierżyński...*, p. 283.

<sup>29</sup> R. Bender, *Dzierżyński...*, p. 183.

<sup>30</sup> Paweł Wieczorkiewicz is wrong in claiming that he was a Polish Jew. P. Wieczorkiewicz [in:] L. Bazyłow, P. Wieczorkiewicz, *Historia Rosji [History of Russia]*, 4th ed., Wrocław-Warszawa-Kraków 2005, p. 417; P. Wieczorkiewicz, *Sowiety [Soviets]*, Łomianki 2017, p. 53. P. Wieczorkiewicz does not provide any proof for this claim, and I have not found any confirmation of it in any sources or scientific literature. It should be remembered that Jews in tsarist Russia were the most persecuted ones in Europe. Jews were generally not allowed to live outside the so-called Pale of Settlement or in large cities, to study, etc. It is unlikely that Menzhinsky's father – had he been a Jew – could have been a teacher in the elite tsarist St. Petersburg Cadet Corps.

refers to him as a Pole<sup>31</sup>. Polish was spoken at his home, and Vyacheslav (Wiesław) was a Catholic. His father taught history in the elite St. Petersburg Cadet Corps. Vyacheslav Rudolfovich received a thorough education. He was a top student in secondary school, graduated in law from the University of St. Petersburg and then – like Lenin – started legal practice. He became involved with the revolutionary movement as early as around 1895, acceded to the RSDWP in 1902, and a year later joined the Bolsheviks. He actively co-edited a Bolshevik paper, for which he was arrested, along with others, in 1905. Yet, he was released on bail after four months. Immediately after his release, he fled through Finland to the West. He lived in Belgium, Switzerland, France (where he studied at the Sorbonne) and the United States. He showed great interest in fiction and wrote and published his own works. He was also interested in the exact sciences – chemistry, physics, astronomy and mathematics. He was an extremely talented linguist. When he was assigned to work in CheKa (1919), he spoke 12 languages, and during his service, he also mastered Chinese, Japanese, Persian and Turkish. He returned to Russia in July 1917 and joined the Office of the Military Organisation at the CC of the RSDWP. After October, he became the People's Commissar of Finance, nominated by Lenin. The well-known American communist journalist John Reed, the author of a famous book about the first days of the Bolshevik revolution, described a meeting with Menzhinsky at the Smolny Institute on 8 November as follows: ‘„In the upstairs café sat a man all by himself in the corner, in a goat-skin cape [...] This was Menzhinsky, Commissar of Finance, whose qualifications were that he had once been clerk in a French bank’<sup>32</sup>. Trotsky spoke badly about Menzhinsky in his autobiography, written ten years later, as the latter was submissive to Stalin<sup>33</sup>.

It was Dzerzhinsky who recruited him to work at VCheKa. With all his intelligence, knowledge and interests, Menzhinsky was a sadist and personally shot people whose innocence he was convinced of. He was sickly and suffered from, among others, coronary disease and spine damage. In his office in Lubyanka, he often received customers stretched out on the couch, explaining that doctors had told him to lie down. He died (10 May 1934) as a result of cardiovascular system failure.

He was succeeded by his then-deputy, Henryk Yagoda. His biography contains exceptionally many blank pages, so those writing about him present this figure in very different ways. Genrikh (Henryk) Grigoryevich Yagoda (1891–1938) was born into a Jewish family in Łódź<sup>34</sup>. From 1907, he belonged to the RSDWP(b). In

<sup>31</sup> B. Bażanow, *Byłem sekretarzem Stalina...*, p. 119.

<sup>32</sup> J. Reed, *Dziesięć dni, które wstrząsnęły światem* [*Ten Days that Shook the World*], transl. by A. Dobrot [W. Grosz], Warszawa 1956, p. 111.

<sup>33</sup> L. Trocki, *Moje życie...*, p. 499.

<sup>34</sup> Such information is provided by *Wielka Encyklopedia PWN* [*The Great PWN Encyclopedia*], vol. 12, Warszawa 2002, p. 357, and G. Przebinda, J. Smaga, *Kto jest kim w Rosji po 1917 roku* [*Who is Who in Russia After 1917*], Kraków 2000, p. 114, but this is not certain. N. Iwanow writes that

the years 1911–1913, he was arrested twice and was in exile. He was drafted into the military in 1915 and was wounded at the front. He actively participated in the October Revolution and then was in the Red Army. From 1920, he was in the security department. As the manager of Dzerzhinsky's office, he was the right-hand man of the creator of the Soviet security service, who appreciated and distinguished him. From 1924, he was the second deputy head of OGPU. Bazhanov suggests that Dzerzhinsky, at the end of his life, was heavily burdened with responsibilities in the field of the national economy and actually entrusted a significant part of OGPU's management activities to Yagoda. After Dzerzhinsky's death, Menzhinsky became the head of OGPU, but the latter's poor health and passive management style meant that the real power in the department passed into the hands of Yagoda. It was Yagoda who was the main organiser of the Gulag. On the orders of the Chief, Yagoda organised and carried out the great Stalinist terror for the first two years. The trial of Zinoviev and Kamenev, clumsily prepared by him, aroused Stalin's dissatisfaction, which resulted in Yagoda's removal (25 September 1936) from the position of the People's Commissar of NKVD. In 1937, Yagoda was arrested. He was accused, among others, of collaboration with the tsarist Okhrana and the German intelligence and of poisoning Gorky and Menzhinsky. Sentenced to death (13 March 1938), he was executed by shooting on the night of 14/15 March 1938. His wife and sister were sent to a labour camp, and his several-year-old son was transferred to an orphanage. His wife was sentenced to 5 years in a labour camp, but she was executed by shooting after one year<sup>35</sup>. This was the beginning of a new form of replacing top-level personnel.

'Above the state and behind the façades of the apparent government, in a maze of multiplied offices, amid the chaos of ineptitude, lies the nucleus of power in the country: the super-effective and super-competent secret police services (...)'<sup>36</sup>. It started with Dzerzhinsky, but will it end with Putin? We do not know.

On 22 August 1991 – following the failed Yanayev coup – the inhabitants of Moscow toppled the Dzerzhinsky statue, but portraits of Iron Felix still hang in the Federal Security Service's rooms.

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the family moved from Płock to Rybinsk (N. Iwanow, *Ludzie Kremla nad Wisłą...*, p. 60). Especially Russian sources and studies mention Rybinsk on the Volga. See Н.В. Петров, К.В. Скоркин, Кто руководил НКВД 1934–1941. Справочник, Международное общество «Мемориал». Издательство «Звенья», Москва 1999, pp. 459–460; similar information at [https://24smi.org/celebrity/13491-genrikh-iyagoda.html#tableofcontents\\_bio](https://24smi.org/celebrity/13491-genrikh-iyagoda.html#tableofcontents_bio) [accessed: 14 November 2023].

<sup>35</sup> L. Mleczin, *Ojcowie terroru*, vol. I: *Dzierżyński...*, p. 150.

<sup>36</sup> H. Arendt, *Korzenie totalitaryzmu [The Origins of Totalitarianism]*, vol. 2, Warszawa 2008, p. 176.

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