

Before the Storm

By 2015 all our planning had come together to form a coherent entity. The detailed design had been refined and could only have been subjected to corrections and changes before final production and installation in exceptional cases, as when we acquired a new artifact of outstanding historical value that fit our story. Building construction was in its final phase. Walking around the interior of the building, we could already imagine exactly what we would see in individual galleries; some of the oversized artifacts were already in place.

As the date of the expected opening approached, promotion of the Museum was becoming more and more important. This was all the more necessary because our activities were constantly contested and distorted by people close to the Law and Justice Party, who repeated the mantra that the Museum was “not Polish enough” without even bothering to become familiar with its actual shape. We made a movie visualizing the exhibitions and also showing some of the most interesting artifacts. Maja Ostaszewska, one of the most famous Polish actresses, was the narrator. I chose her because of her roles in the movie *Katyń* by Andrzej Wajda and the *Time of Honor*, a very popular TV series about the Polish wartime experience. However, she was a very versatile actress who also performed in productions for more general audiences. Maja Ostaszewska also became the voice of the Museum; she recorded the audioguides. Recounting the war in the voice of a woman demolished stereotypes and reinforced that ours was not a strictly military museum but showed the fate of civilians, women, and children.

I tried to interest the government in the Museum’s fast-approaching opening. As a member of the Historical Council of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, at one of the meetings I proposed to invite the leaders of European and world countries to the opening, which would provide a great opportunity—even greater than the celebration at Westerplatte in 2009—to showcase Polish heritage abroad. After all, this was one reason why the Museum had been created and so much of Polish taxpayers’ money spent on it. Minister Grzegorz Schetyna expressed interest, but it was not a done deal. The forthcoming presidential and then parliamentary elections had eclipsed all other topics. However, I felt that throughout the years, we were able to build such an intense network of contacts with the most important world war museums that the opening of the Museum of the Second World War could be a big international event, even without the support of the government. In any event, we could already see on the horizon the end of the work that had started in 2008. But I would never have predicted at that time that every-

thing would soon be turned upside down and that the Museum and I would become public enemies of the new political order.

