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How the world spreads

I can't help but come back to the topic of misrepresentations of the debate about the Nazi and Soviet crimes. The Minister of Justice Remigijus Šimašius, previously part of the neo-liberal mouthpiece, the Lithuanian Free Market Institute, wrote an [entry in his blog](#) about the accusations against Lithuanians for massively collaborating with the Nazis during WWII. The world reaction was translated back to Lithuanians in the same manner as always...

The blog is personal, yet, of course, as a minister he should feel responsible. Šimašius supports the Prime Minister who had participated in BBC's Hard Talk show. Šimašius lists several statements:

- The fact that there were collaborators among Lithuanians is not enough to attribute the label of 'Jew-shooters' to the Lithuanians as a totality - with this I agree, stereotyping has never made the world a nicer place.
- He says that before the Nazis came Jews lived in relative peace with the local population, and their situation was better than in many European countries. Here the historical perspective is messed up. Although it's true about the relative peace and low numbers of pogroms, the situation and political representation of the Jews in the pre-war authoritarian regime was deteriorating, and levels of anti-Semitism were soaring. Such identification with the marginalised minority as in Bulgaria or Denmark was rare in Lithuania. The fact that the UK, the US and other countries refused to accept refugees is true, and it's still for those countries to acknowledge it (it's documented in Yad Vashem, too). Nobody was innocent. For example, the Forum for Living History in Stockholm once had an exhibition on Sweden and the Holocaust, showing how Swedish businesses profitted from concentration camp inmates, how the society was hostile to the refugees that the government welcomed, and how sterilisation of the Roma was widespread. Yet it feels like Šimašius is comparing those acts of other countries to the image that Lithuania was way before the war, and this is, err... methodologically strange.
- Later Šimašius suggests that calling Lithuania an anti-Semitic country is an insult to those Lithuanians who risk their lives saving Jews, and that there was no formal cooperation with the Nazis (the Nazi occupation followed the Soviet one), and the Nazis even failed to establish a local SS unit there.

The entry is typical of a Lithuanian who knows something and fills the rest with opinion. These days we're all fed and watered with the image of Lithuania as a once-tolerant multi-cultural

society with thriving Jewish culture. The minister, who would not take time to read heavyweight historical studies, hears these stories and believes in them. Celebrating multi-culturalism was a part of the Capital of Culture year in Vilnius. You can't blame a private person for having these opinions. What is problematic is that he presents these bullet points as historical facts to be told to opponents in discussion, not something like 'as far as I know...'

Yet apart from being a blogger, Šimašius is, obviously, a public figure. It didn't take long for the World Jewish Congress (it's the first time I noticed its rather... umm... ambitious slogan, 'All Jews are responsible for one another'. Good luck) to [react](#) (<http://www.worldjewishcongress.org/en/main/showNews/id/8694>). The president of the WJC says it's a distortion of historical facts, and that "It beggars belief that someone should today still argue that anti-Semitism played no role in the extermination of Lithuanian Jewry when the collaboration of so many Lithuanians with the Nazi occupiers is well-documented."

Strangely, the post on the website does not close the quotation marks, so it's impossible to tell how much of the following backgrounder is the president's words. Now, as the reaction was [translated in Delfi](#) (<http://www.delfi.lt/news/daily/lithuania/zydu-kongresas-daug-lietuviu-kolaboravo-su-naciais.d?id=26481039>), quoting the WJC's website, an additional sentence appears:

"...when the collaboration of so many Lithuanians with the Nazi occupiers is well-documented" is replaced by "Other European countries can argue that their inhabitants defended Jews from the Nazis. Lithuania can't". I didn't find anything like that in the WJC statement. Of course, it wouldn't be true, as Lithuanians are among the six families whose stories are displayed in a separate exhibition room at Yad Vashem, and many more names are included among the Righteous of the Nations. But has anyone said that? Of course, to write as if they did means to insult these people, and you can imagine what an outrage it will cause among the readers of Delfi. The piece already has over 500 comments. You can dismiss Delfi as a 'dumpster' of news and views, as some do, but it has to be acknowledged that (a) many people in Lithuania and abroad (including myself) use Delfi as the main source of Lithuanian news; (b) it's a well-known secret that Parliament members read Delfi from their laptops when they are bored in Parliament sittings.

Who on Earth inserted the line?

On a lighter, but related note, allow me some self-advertising. My exchange of letters with my colleague Stanislovas Kairys about the issue of comparison of Nazi and Soviet crimes will be available online starting from Wednesday [here](#) (<http://www.atgimimas.lt/articles.php?id=1259826305>), and is now available in printed form of the 'Atgimimas'.

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