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## Germany Honors Red Partisan under Investigation for Mass Murder in Vilnius

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380 Comments

Former red partisan Fania Brancovskaja, 87, was awarded a German medal, the Cross for Merit, at the German Embassy [in Vilnius] Wednesday. The unit in which Brancovskaya served is accused in Lithuania of crimes against humanity—her colleagues murdered 46 (including 22 children) civilians in the Salcininkai region and burned down a village. Conservative/Christian Democrat Kestutis Masiulis, chairman of the Parliamentary Contact Group with the Federal Republic of Germany, told DELFI the award was insulting and humiliating to Lithuanians.

Brancovskaja was a member of one of three partisan units (Margiris, Death to Fascists, Death to Occupiers) who carried out mass murders of civilians in the Salcininkai region. On January 29, 1944, these units killed 46 Polish civilians in the village of Kaniukai: 22 children and 24 adults, with more than ten wounded as well. According to historians, the village was attacked that day by 120 to 150 Reds. They were killed because they refused to give up food.

The mass murder case is still being investigated by the Prosecutor General. Senior prosecutor of the Special Investigations Department Rimvydas Valentukevicius says that the suspects who are still alive claim they were punishing the villagers for collaboration with Germans. During the course of

the investigation, however, it was found that the people were killed because they refused to hand over their last food reserves (units of reds constantly took their food, so the people at the end of their patience decided not to obey the bandits anymore).

The reds weren't satisfied with mass murder, they also burned the village down. According to information from the prosecutor, Brancovskaja was somewhere else at the time and didn't take part in the massacre. For that reason she was interrogated as a witness in the criminal case last year. Formally, she is "clean," although, according to attorneys, gang members, even if they haven't taken part in a crime by the gang, are still gang members.

Officials say Brancovskaja became an object of attention after a report by Conservative/Christian Democrat MP Rytas Kupcinskas was received concerning mass murders of civilians by Soviet partisans in Kaniukai village. Allegedly his request was accompanied by a press item and the conclusion of an academic study by one historian. This material contained information about Soviet partisans who were possibly still living who might have participated in the massacre and destruction of Kaniukai village. Among those listed was Brancovskaja.

### They Expected Security with the Reds

When Lithuanian prosecutors wanted to question Brancovskaja and some other people, great outrage by the USA and Israeli Jews arose last year. Allegedly, attacking prominent local Jews who were Holocaust survivors and had bravely fought the occupiers is "selective and vindictive." It appeared ironic to the Jewish community that the woman had been decorated a year before by the US Embassy and the Yiddish Institute for fighting the Nazi occupiers.

Brancovskaja herself told foreign journalists she hadn't taken part in the destruction of Kaniukai village, and joined the partisans with the desire to preserve her own life rather than kill.

She began to take part in the Red partisan movement when she turned 20, still inside the ghetto. "We fought the Nazi government, not local residents," Brancovskaja explained.

Although the woman thought about the possibility of moving to Israel, she stayed to live with family (she has two children, six grandchildren and two great-grandchildren) in Vilnius. The woman works as a librarian at the Vilnius Yiddish Institute operating at Vilnius University.

### Masiulis: That's Insulting

“Today I coincidentally spoke a long time with the German ambassador. If I had known about this, I would have asked, how this happened here. This is unacceptable. It's possible to understand the Germans, who now attempt in all ways to honor people who struggled against fascism, to compensate for injuries. But in Lithuania the different red partisans have a totally different connotation. In Lithuania a greater delicacy is required. It is very unpleasant, truly. We, Lithuanians, react very sensitively to such things—the wound of Soviet terror is still bleeding heavily. The awarding of people who have the blood of Lithuanians on their hands is an insult, a humiliation,” MP Masiulis said Wednesday.

DELFI was unable to hear the position of the German Embassy because the embassy sent out a press release about the awards ceremony during the last minutes of the working day. The press release says Brancovskaja was decorated “for extraordinary merit in the search for reconciliation between Germans and Jews in Central and Eastern Europe.”

German president Horst Koehler awarded her the distinction, and the ambassador to Lithuanian Hans-Peter Annen presented the award to her. Brancovskaja is presented as deputy director of the Union of Former Concentration Camp Prisoners.