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<http://blog.delfi.lt/donskis/7749/>

Leonidas Donskis's blog:

When Will the Truth Finally Set Us Free?

[Translated by Geoff Vasil for www.HolocaustInTheBaltics.com]

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by Leonidas Donskis

I will admit that when I read political analyst Kestutis Girnius's comments on the Lithuanian Provisional Government and the Lithuanian Activists Front, and about the supposedly low level of academic research and documentation of these phenomena, I found myself in a state of disbelief that a person whom I consider one of the most sober-minded and most insightful of our political commentators could write this. Without citing his earlier statements on radio and in publications on this topic, here is the link to Kestutis Girnius's latest commentary:

http://www.alfa.lt/straipsnis/10405627/?Neistirta.musu.istorija=2010-08-30_07-45

[Note: English translation of the original article by K. Girnius is available at:

<http://www.holocaustinthebaltics.com/2010July27GirniusOnProvisionalGovernment.pdf> —Trans.]

First of all, only someone who has totally ignored the work of professionals in this field is capable of talking about the lack of research on this problem and then authoritatively speaking ex cathedra about matters he has never studied, or consciously believing the revision of history. Sadly, pretenses to omniscience and expert pronouncements in this field of inquiry, where errors or lack of competence due to the zones of special political and moral sensitivity that lurk appear dreadful, and can compromise even a good journalist.

I, too, am not an historian who researched archival material, but I have heard and read numerous times at international conferences historians of World War II and its crimes such as Sir Martin Gilbert, Martin Dean, Christoph Dieckmann, Joachim Tauber, Saulius Suziedelis, Yitzhak Arad and other famous British, German, American and Israeli historians. And they certainly do not believe that we cannot say anything with clarity about the year 1941 in Lithuania. There is material in abundance. The only thing possibly lacking is the will and courage to look the facts and the reality they reveal in the face.

Initially, for example, the following material:

http://www.komisija.lt/Files/www.komisija.lt/File/Tyrimu_baze/Naciu%20okupacija/Zydu%20naikinimas%201941%20m.%20vasara/S.SuziedelisC.Dieckmann_Zudynes_Jungtine%20versija.pdf

Incidentally, the ranks of the researchers of these famous war crimes researchers are enriched by respected Lithuanian historians not lacking in intellectual honesty, including Liudas Truska, Arunas Bubnys and Valentinas Brandisauskas. Therefore all of our ceaseless, repeated amateurish and politically exploitable efforts to reconsider the matters of this sensitive field of inquiry, seeking interpretations that are psychologically acceptable or politically favorable to us, will sooner or later be demolished by professionals like a house of cards.

Second, it is difficult for me to comprehend that the explanation of this problem allegedly lies in the historical-political narratives of ethnic Lithuanians and Jews, especially when reference is made not to some exotic beings or mysterious unknowns, but to the murder of more than 220,000 citizens of the Republic of Lithuania. What do separate narratives have to do with it when the Nazis and white armbanders who murdered all Lithuanian Jews committed the crime first of all against the Lithuanian state and the political nation, and in the collective identity of the Lithuanian nation against all humanity? After all it wasn't some sort of mystical non-Jews who murdered the Jews, the occupational Nazi government together with local collaborators exterminated the Jews who were citizens of the Republic of Lithuania.

That's the whole matter. Why confuse the concepts and contrive an irreconcilable conflict between two memory groups when the discussion centers around crimes committed against citizens of the Republic of Lithuania, not against the people of a foreign state or of a distant culture? But if the discussion is that we still do not understand the motives of people who chose to collaborate with Germany and its Nazi rhetoric, all that can be said is that this—to paraphrase Lithuanian and Israeli writer Grigorijus Kanovicus's metaphor—the bookkeeping of death, accompanied by studies of the motives and circumstances of crime, evil and treason, doesn't change much.

Crime against God and humanity in the end is nothing other than crime, and the motives and dramas behind it are not important. After all, a thing called ethics exists, and it is not surpassed by explanations of the finer bookkeeping details of crime, baseness and death. Instead, it seems to be that the crime itself stops existing if you haven't examined its motives. It seems that its motives and details are the most important. Let me recall Sigmund Freud's idea that morals are in the practical interest of humanity, and that therefore the essence of morality is contained in the intentional non-execution of evil or in abstaining from it, and not in the rationalization of evil or its exaltation to the level of metaphysics, psychology or even theology. Are the motives of a crime really capable of justifying the crime?

If what is being said is that behind every act of treason or collaboration with destructive forces stands something akin to a Shakespearian tragedy and we do not fully understand all the painful details, which most likely no one is destined to comprehend, then that is something with which I completely agree. But in that case, why isn't that same principle of empathy applied to those who lived through their own tragedy and bitter experience collaborating with Stalin's Soviet Union, and thus betraying their own country? Politicians and public figures who worked with an occupying power cannot be

judged according to how much they eased or made more difficult the situation of citizens of the country: if this power was inimical to the citizens of their country, they betrayed them by working with the occupying power. And it is unimportant when that power arrived or in what succession. Period.

And so I don't understand the moral logic that says we should be lenient towards politicians and public figures if over a brief period in power they didn't have time to hurt their citizens, or if they hurt their citizens less than the occupiers did. This sort of argumentation is still being used to discuss the Provisional Government. Allegedly they didn't have time to hurt Jews. Fine, but then why isn't the same moral logic applied to Lithuanian Communists who always told us that only they held in check the evil spread by Moscow and in their heart only sought the best for their country?

The political elite doesn't exist in order to increase or decrease the suffering of their citizens caused by an invader or occupier, it exists to delegitimize the rule of the occupier, to defend its country from foreign domination and to strive for legitimate governance for its country. A political elite which begins to act otherwise under occupation becomes a collaborator. No one has ever defined and explained the concept of collaboration in any other way, and most likely never will. We have to come to terms with the idea that the dictionary of morality and political conceptions is not compiled according to our personal political sympathies and biographies.

A few words on a difficult and bitter problem which we haven't had the power and internal freedom to face directly yet. Anyone who has read *Sukilimas* [Uprising] by the Lithuanian ambassador to Germany Kazys Skirpa already knows that it was not in any way a naive group who created the Lithuanian Activist Front [LAF], without which there would not have been a Provisional Government. Just as the political platform of the LAF, full of National Socialist ideological pearls, was written by rather refined and intellectual people; it was no mistake that Kazys Skirpa thanked philosopher Antanas Maecina, an author of the LAF program, in *Sukilimas* for playing the most active role in drafting that document (see Kazys Skirpa, *Sukilimas Lietuvos suverenumui atstatyti*, Washington, D. C. Franciscan Fathers Press, 1973, page 573).

A few items from this platform. In 1941 Antanas Maceina identified these priorities when he drew up the LAF program on the liberation of Lithuania from the Soviet Union:

- (1) to preserve the racial purity of the Lithuanian nation;
- (2) to induce Lithuanian women to perform their primary mission: to give birth to as many healthy babies as possible for the nation;
- (3) to support Lithuanian ethnic domination in the largest cities of the country;
- (4) to battle resolutely and without compromise against the tendency established in Lithuanian culture of insufficient loyalty to and respect for Lithuanianness, or against

those who do not consider the nation and national unity the top priority (ibid., pp. 567-572).

So the LAF was completely and directly connected with the policies coordinated by colonel Kazys Skirpa with his Nazi views in Berlin, and the Provisional Government was actually formed there. Whatever the case, one of the biggest and most protected taboos in Lithuanian history and memory remains the very same LAF which rose up in 1941 to win back Lithuania's lost independence, but at same time spread Goebbels's anti-Semitic propaganda in Lithuania.

Of course the uprising of June, 1941, was a political and psychological necessity for Lithuanians, because there had to be some reaction to the occupation and annexation of Lithuania in 1940 by the Soviet Union. Unfortunately, part of the uprising immediately turned onto the worst possible path by choosing Nazi Germany as the lesser of evils. And here is where the big schism among Lithuanians happens, not because some are considered culturally alien Jews and others true Lithuanians, but because a still unsolved moral and political dilemma looms, one often discussed in Lithuania and among Lithuanians abroad, namely, whether it is allowable to ally oneself with any and all in order to regain national independence, even with Satan himself if he happens to temporarily be on one's own side.

This dilemma and crimes against one's own country and humanity, rather than the supposed conflict between Lithuanians and Jews, divided our society and fractured its memory. It's unlikely another country having experienced the occupation and Soviet terror would have totally avoided such variations of fate. So I am not moralizing or accusing anyone here. I am just stating the fact that the Provisional Government started playing a complicated and confused game with the Nazis, sincerely expecting to restore Lithuanian independence. Members of the government quickly came to understand the nature of the people they had fallen in with, and were completely disillusioned regarding Germany's desire to restore Lithuanian independence. Some of them lost favor and were even persecuted by those same Nazis.

This tragic game was doomed to fail. It's difficult to imagine anything more politically and morally senseless than the choice between the rule of Hitler and Stalin—between cholera and the plague, as Tomas Venclova once put it. No one can deny that the Provisional Government was inspired by the LAF. LAF members, who spread anti-Semitic propaganda, systematically and actively used such pearls of Nazi rhetoric as “Judeo-Bolshevik conspiracy,” “the plan of the Jewish bankers and Communists,” “the Jewish yoke and exploitation,” etc.

Here's a quote from Naujoji Lithuania (July 4, 1941) [a Lithuanian magazine] upon which it would be difficult and perhaps pointless to comment additionally:

“The largest parasite and exploiter of the Lithuanian nation, as with other nations, was and some places still is the Jew <...> The Jewry of Lithuania, whose goal is that very same Jewish imperialism, had placed a noose around the neck of every Lithuanian and expected to finish him off finally. Today, thanks to the genius of

Adolf Hitler and the valiant German military, we are free from the Jewish yoke. But this is not enough. Jewry today has still not subsided, it is doing harm everywhere. Jewry has been left by the Communists to cause disturbances, the Jews are Communist spies <...> [One] needs to fight such an enemy severely [with the] severest [of measures] <...> The struggle against Communism is the struggle against Jewry <...> Abolish Communism, abolish Jewry! The New Lithuania, joined to Adolf Hitler's New Europe, must be cleansed of Jews <...> Exterminating Jewry, and together with it Communism, is the first task of the New Lithuania."

After such a passage there probably are no doubts as to the source of the equals sign between Jews and Communism in our consciousness, just as it is clear where the wellspring of the double genocide theory lie (the source of this theory is best characterized by the simple formulation echoing forth from the collective unconscious: "You deported us, and we shot you.")

Whatever the true dispensation of events, that doesn't mean that the uprising of 1941 needs to be interpreted exclusively as the prelude to the Holocaust. But the fallacious beliefs, horrible mistakes and crimes of a portion of the activists need to be recognized. Sadly, some Lithuanian politicians, intellectuals and common people were influenced by Nazi ideas at the beginning of World War II. And it is an historical fact that in choosing Nazism they betrayed Lithuania and trampled upon the values of the democratic world.

Of course we cannot surrender to naiveté and begin to portray the most terror-filled period in the history through a black and white lens. All sorts of things happened: some victims later became perpetrators, and some perpetrators victims. Two regimes made for one another pulled all of Europe into their meat grinder and surprisingly quickly deformed, or perhaps completely destroyed, human interaction. We still feel the consequences. And we will them for a long time to come. Europe divides up each time the need to assess the historical and political legacy of both totalitarian regimes that created modern barbarity arises—hopelessly attempting to form some sort of scale for measuring crimes and grading them according to motives and their degree of proximity or distance.

And here, incidentally, is where the controversy over the Prague Declaration arises: no person with common sense and a conscience will jump to the defense of Stalinism and the crimes of the Soviet Union against humanity. But when this is used in an attempt to justify a niche wherein the history of the Holocaust is rewritten or placed in a "new" context, any European who has not lost his historical memory will sense the aspiration to justify criminals by claiming they themselves were victims of another regime. Unfortunately this is exactly the same historical and moral relativity which in our country is used in accusations against the West of today and their "rotten" liberals, only in this case it is our own moral and historical relativity.

I have no doubt there were some moral people and idealists in the Provisional Government. Most likely they were tragic figures standing for their desecrated homeland and trying somehow to restore its lost dignity and the political life snatched from it, and

only later understanding that they were again to be made into satellites, only this time of another regime, just as brutal, and even more horrible for a portion of Lithuanian citizens and for humanity. There were also members of the Provisional Government who were terrified by the Nazis and the murderers and marauders of their own nation. There were those who rescued their Jewish compatriots.

I just won't apply this to Kazys Skirpa and his followers. Most of what we read in the LAF propaganda material were Nazi texts, not those of Lithuanian patriots, most often probably mere translations of Goebbels's propaganda into Lithuanian and nothing more. We do know of the LAF's call for rescinding the rights bestowed by Lithuanian grand duke Vytautas the Great to Jews (incidentally, this was a legal and political absurdity). So, add the horror of war and everything here is intertwined and mixed up. Just as among post-war partisans there were marauders along with real idealists and heroes, so among the insurgents during the uprising and in the LAF everything could be mixed up, pettiness alongside idealism, the criminal element and authentic patriots, who had taken the wrong path.

But this is still not the most painful of our problems. I am convinced that the current Lithuanian state has made a major and perhaps even an historically unprecedented error by recognizing the Provisional Government as *de jure* real and a government that restored our country's independence. Because if that's the way it is, then the Provisional Government must bear responsibility for the mass murder of uninvolved, unarmed civilians, Lithuanian citizens of Jewish origins, which began in Lithuania before the Nazis entered the country—these are simply the historical facts. Yes, there were German Nazis at Lietukis garage, but it was Lithuanians who murdered the Jews, while the Germans filmed and photographed them.

We know that some of the Provisional Government were upset by this horror, but they could do nothing and did do nothing. If so, let us just say candidly that they did not control the situation in the country, they were controlled by the Germans. If so, they were no government, just a group of patriots who sought to restore lost national independence. But if we recognize they were the legitimate government, then they bear responsibility, not for what is commonly claimed in Lithuania, that a handful of murderers and low-lives, but entire Lithuanian city and town municipalities, police officers and the military took part in the logistics and execution of mass murders of Jews, in their organization and execution. And these, after all, are state sectors. Who, then, answers for them and their actions?

All of this is fact, known by all war historians. So what are we doing in this situation? Are we recognizing after all that the Provisional Government answers for what took place in the Lithuanian state, or are we declaring that Lithuania didn't exist at all at that time and that those who murdered its citizens were criminals, inspired by the Nazis and their criminal ideology, who betrayed their country? After all we can't claim the Provisional Government were heroes while at the same time absolve them of responsibility for crimes against humanity that were committed in the country under their

rule. Let us decide finally ourselves, with dignity, as a free and democratic state, and not just because we're pressured by Western Europe and the USA.

With the 70th anniversary of the June, 1941, Uprising and the Provisional Government coming up in 2011, it would be worthwhile exchanging views about what we will mark, and how. Probably the battle for public opinion has already begun. I don't dare suggest anything to anyone. I can only say what my position is as a loyal citizen of the Republic of Lithuania.

I understand those for whom the honor of their parents is important, especially when their parents were honorable people and patriots of their country, often themselves horrified by the participation of their compatriots in the bloody Nazi orgy, but forced even so by the machine of history and the end of the classical world toward that terrible and only later comprehensible scenario. I even understand those who will mark the 70th anniversary of the uprising as a symbol of the spirit of freedom of Lithuanians, just as I understand those who will try to place the Provisional Government onto the honorable pages of Lithuania's history.

I understand all this perfectly as a human being. The truth is brutal and undermines almost the entire political and historical narrative upon which our patriotic education was and still is based, especially among the Lithuanian émigré communities abroad. But I categorically do not agree and do not approve of this self-deception, or at best, a kind of life in a world of half-truth. As a citizen, as a person who has chosen Lithuania for his entire life as his primary and essential political and moral space, I will never sign on to that.

And therefore I am really not preparing to participate in such celebrations, if they happen. I cannot and do not want to consider as glorious and holy that which became Lithuania's tragedy and that which symbolizes the beginning of the total annihilation of the Jews of Lithuania. If by that time we do not achieve any political or civic solidarity on this question, remaining as now in two separate camps, well, then, let's at least not lie to ourselves and the world. Let's not rewrite history and let's not live a lie.

A dignified moment of silence in June, 2011, accompanied by the professional work by historians and a principled recognition of fact, would be emblematic of our emancipation.

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