LITHUANIA IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR PRESENTATION OF A RESEARCH PROGRAMME

Reasons for the Programme. The public presentation of a research programme is not commonplace in the scholarly life of Lithuania, and therefore that alone means crossing a certain barrier. Furthermore, there is one more barrier, which is still more difficult and more significant, i.e., the start of a complex comparative study of Lithuania's situation in the Second World War. The latter barrier presupposes the former – the presentation for the public consideration of things, which should be done, simultaneously explaining why they have not yet been done.

It is a historical cynicism that people take their greatest interest in those periods of time which are related to the utmost tensions and pressures of all human endeavours, i.e., wars, revolutions, coups d'état, etc. These are periods which result in massive losses of lives and tragedies. In the history of Lithuania such a period would be the Second World War, which has been researched clearly inadequately so far. The point is not an insufficient attention to this theme; on the contrary, sometimes there was too much of it. When that attention assumed the form of historical studies, they often tended to be superficial, biased or stereotypical.

What concerns Lithuanian historians, whose task now is an objective presentation of the historical scholarship of Lithuania, three major factors, conditioning their moral and methodological difficulties, can be indicated. Firstly, in World War II, more precisely, during the Nazi occupation of Lithuania, the Jewish community of Lithuania was actually entirely exterminated as a historical ethno-cultural part of Lithuanian society, and Lithuanians took part in that extermination as well. If, in addition to the tragedy of the Holocaust, the elimination of the Poles and the Germans – also historical Lithuanian ethno-cultures – is added, one is confronted with a phenomenon, or to put it differently, a presupposition that during the Second World War one more war was waged in Lithuania – a war among its fellow citizens as different nations. Secondly, despite the fact that such an assumption is not at all pleasant to the Lithuanians, it is related to the second circumstance. Although the Second World War greatly reduced the country's population, it also enlarged its national territory, thus making Lithuania a unique country (possibly with the exception of Russia) among the nations involved in the war. And thirdly, the Second World War did not bring statehood to Lithuania, in contrast to many other nations.

No wonder that due to the combination of these circumstances the modern historian has been faced with insurmountable ideologized burdens. The times, however, are different now, and the historian is freed from the service to ideology and stereotypes and is confronted with the need for an open, moral and complex research.

Scholarly Inspirations. It is understandable that the research will be conducted taking into account the groundwork done. Specialist literature, in one way or another dealing with Lithuania in the Second World War, is sufficient to inspire the formulation of unsolved challenging problems.

One such major issue is the causes and circumstances of the disappearance of Lithuania and of the other two Baltic countries from the international political community. Western historians based their respective works on the fact that neither the President of the United States, Franklin D. Roosevelt, nor the Prime Minister of Great Britain, Sir Winston Churchill, recognized the annexation of the Baltic States. Correspondingly, there had been no 'new Munich' and the responsibility for the annexation must be placed on Joseph Stalin alone. Nonetheless, the material presented by the same historians reveals that Stalin acted taking into consideration the attitudes of the Western countries - respectively there was a 'Baltic Munich', albeit not a signed one.¹ Therefore, all things considered, a question arises: was not the disappearance of Lithuania and the two other Baltic countries conditioned in the long run by the common interest of the great powers to get rid of the three countries as unwanted? And if such a shared interest did exist, what were its causes?

The second issue is the Holocaust in Lithuania and the related Lithuanian-Jewish dilemma. It must be noted that in the radical variant of the Lithuanian interpretation this dilemma does not exist at all. Here the main accent is placed on the June Uprising of 1941, the aftermath of which was the re-established Lithuanian State, and the Lithuanians only 'recovered their dignity'.² Meanwhile in the analogous Jewish interpretation the event called the 'uprising' by Lithuanians is treated as a symbol of the Holocaust, when 'the rats crawled from their holes and began attacking human beings'.³ In Lithuania liberally structured investigations of the

¹ D. Kirby, 'Morality or Expediency', *The Baltic States in Peace and War 1917-1945*, ed. V. S. Vardys and R. Misiūnas (The Pennsylvania State Univ. Press, 1978); R. A. Schnorf, 'The Baltic States in US-Soviet Relations, 1939-1942', *Lituanica*, 1966; L. Juda, 'United States Nonrecognition of the Soviet Union's Annexation of the Baltic States. Law and Politics', *Journal of Baltic Studies*, vol. vi, no. 1, 1975; A. Feis, *Churchill, Roosevelt, Stalin* (New York: Princeton, 1966); B. Makauskas, 'Didžiųjų pasaulio valstybių požiūris į Baltijos valstybes II pasaulinio karo metu', *Lituanica*, nr. 3(27), 1996.

² A. Liekis, *Lietuvos laikinoji vyriausybė (1941 06 22-08 05)* (Vilnius, 2000).

³ A. Slavinas, *Gibel' Pompei* (Tel Aviv, 1997); R. Misiūnas, R. Taagepera, *The Baltic States: years of dependence 1940-1980*. (Los Angeles, 1983); A. Lieven, *The Baltic Revolution: Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and the Path to Independence* (New Haven and London, 1993).

Holocaust seem to be only in the initial stage of the solution of the aforementioned Lithuanian-Jewish dilemma.⁴ Nevertheless, the question is still unanswered: why were the Jews so utterly exterminated namely in Lithuania in such a comparatively short time – in the second half of 1941? Various aspects of the research (for instance, one of them could be the elucidation of the mechanism of the killings in the provinces of Lithuania) would be the establishment of a general system of coordinates encompassing two principal criteria – the horizontal one – geopolitical and the vertical – moral.

Lastly, the third problem would be related to the identification of the Lithuanians as a political community. The German Commissar General Adrian Renteln is known not to have considered Lithuanians a state nation but merely as peasants easy to integrate into the German nation.⁵ On the other hand, some Polish politicians also intended to introduce commissariat rule in Lithuania.⁶ Thus, the research of the appearance of the rule of Soviet commissars in Lithuania would be one more logical scholarly issue.

Aims. Doubtless, at the present time the aims of the research programme can be only preliminary – in the course of the work they would be revised. From the very outset it must be taken into account that for Lithuania the Second World War was not merely the Nazi occupation, no matter how strong that image might be. At the start of the war Lithuania was an independent state, and the issue of its statehood as the principal value should probably be the thread uniting all the aspects of the problems under consideration and leading to their solution. The emphasis on the question of statehood should not be understood as an expression of the apologetics of statism. From the viewpoint of a scholarly analysis this seems to be the most convenient indicator in identifying Lithuania as a

⁴ S. Sužiedėlis, 'Penkiasdešimt metų praėjus: lietuvių tautos sukilimo ir laikinosios vyriausybės interpretacijų disonansai', *Metmenys*, nr. 61, 1991; L. Truska, 'Ir atleisk mums mūsų tėvų ir senelių nuodėmes (Apie holokaustą Lietuvoje 1941 m.)', *Kultūros barai*, nr. 5–6, 1999; V. Brandišauskas, 'Lietuvių ir žydų santykiai 1940–1941 metais', *Darbai ir Dienos*, nr. 2(11), 1996; A. Eidintas, comp., *Lietuvos žydų žudynių byla: Dokumentų ir straipsnių rinkinys* (Vilnius, 2001); A. Bubnys, 'Mažieji Lietuvos žydų getai ir laikinos izoliavimo stovyklos 1941–1943 m.', *Lietuvos istorijos metraštis*, 1999; Y. Arad, 'The "Final Solution" in Lithuania in the Light of German Documentation', *Yad Vashem Studies*, vol. 11, 1976; Ch. Dieckmann, 'Der Krieg und die Ermordung der litauischen Juden', *Nationalsozialistische Vernichtungspolitik 1939–1945: Neue Forschungen und Kontroversen* (Frankfurt am Main, 1998); D. Levin, *Lithuania*, Encyclopedia of the Holocaust, New York, vol. 3, pp. 895–899.

⁵ A generalized report of Commissar General Renteln, 1942. A. Bubnys, *Vokiečių okupuota Lietuva. 1941–1945* (Vilnius, 1998), pp. 530–539.

⁶ A. Bubnys, 'Armijos Krajojvos ištakos ir ideologija Lietuvoje', *Armija Krajoja Lietuvoje* (Vilnius–Kaunas, 1995).

relatively small political entity in the international and geopolitical context, which to a marked degree determined and destined the processes in Lithuania itself.

According to their internal and external aspects, the main tasks of the investigation fall into several groups:

1. The examination of the decisions and the impact of the policy of the great powers during World War II with regard to:
 - a) Lithuania's geopolitical dependency after the war;
 - b) the formation of the Lithuanian state territory;
 - c) Lithuanian demographic cataclysms.
2. The determination of the consequences of the destruction of Lithuanian statehood in 1940 for internal political, social and psychological processes.
3. The reconstruction of Lithuanian domestic life under German occupation, disclosing:
 - a) the specific nature of German rule in Lithuania;
 - b) Lithuanian self-rule and its characteristics;
 - c) Lithuanian social and political life;
 - d) the condition of ethnic minorities (Jews, Poles, Russians and Germans);
 - e) the ways of imparting fresh impetus for the study of the Holocaust in Lithuania;
 - f) collaboration and resistance;
 - g) the peculiarities of armed (Soviet, Polish, Jewish) resistance;
 - h) the reasons behind Lithuanian emigration in 1944–45 and its social structure.

THEMATIC PARTS OF THE PROGRAMME

I. The Lithuanian Problem in the International Context during World War II

(the internal aspect)

Research Topics:

1. The Policy of Neutrality and its Decline (summer and autumn of 1939).
2. The Causes of the Failure to Form a Government in Exile (after the annexation of 1940).
3. The Genesis and Development of the Non-Recognition Policy of Annexation.
4. Lithuanian-Polish Diplomatic Contacts (Lithuania as Part of the Polish Question during World War II).
5. The Impact of the Policy of the Great Powers on Lithuanian Emigration.
6. The Effect of the Holocaust on the Lithuanian Question in the International Context.

These topics could serve the basis for scholarly publications, conferences; the issue of the Lithuanian question in international politics could be the subject of a doctoral dissertation.

II. The First Soviet Occupation of 1940–41

The analysis of the Soviet occupations (of the period of 1940–41 and 1944–1990) would require separate programmes. In this context the research would deal with the impact of the Soviet occupation on the processes which had started under Nazi rule.

III. Nazi-occupied Lithuania in the Second World War

(the internal aspect)

Research topics:

1. The German Social, Economic and Cultural Policy in Lithuania (How right was Commissar General Renteln in his assessment of Lithuanian peasants as pro-German?).
2. Socio-Political Life in German-Occupied Lithuania (The reasons for the lack of the political and organizational preparation of the Lithuanian political élite for the oncoming second Soviet occupation).
3. The 'Red' Underground in Lithuania (alternative views of Šumauskas and Zimanas on the Lithuanian peasant as a potential builder of the LSSR or a Nazi collaborator).
4. The Socio-Demographic Situation in Lithuania during World War II.

Note. Each of these issues can be themes for doctoral theses due to the abundance of documents and archival sources to be found mainly in Lithuania.

IV. Complex Publication of Sources

Parallel to the research of the internal and external situation of Lithuania during World War II related document collections could be published. A separate programme for this kind of activity could be drawn. In any case, the published materials would shed more light on the World War II issues in general and in relation to Lithuania in particular.

Summing up, it must be stressed that the success of the programme would greatly depend on the co-operation of Lithuanian institutions with their counterparts in other countries. Up to the present time agreement has already been reached with the Russian Institute of World History and the Warsaw Institute of History. One of the provisions of the agreement is the comparison of the situation during World War II in the involved countries. The programme is open to all interested parties.

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