INTERNATIONAL COMMISSION FOR THE EVALUATION OF THE CRIMES OF THE NAZI AND SOVIET OCCUPATION REGIMES IN LITHUANIA

The Nazi Occupation of 1941 – 1944. The Holocaust and Other Nazi Crimes.

The Preconditions of the Holocaust in Lithuania

CONCLUSIONS
(Approved on 19 June, 2002)

1. By the end of the nineteenth century, within the framework of the Lithuanian national movement, in addition to the religious prejudice originating from traditional anti-Judaism, there emerged contemporary Lithuanian anti-Semitism, caused mostly by economic factors. On the other hand, the ideology of modern anti-Semitism reflected in the works of the activists of the national revival movement did not evolve in the same way as it did in the anti-Semitic writings in Poland, Germany and Russia.

2. After World War I, with the Jewish parties politically supporting the independence of Lithuania, the aspirations of Lithuanians in the conflict over Vilnius as well as the *de jure* recognition of Lithuania's statehood, and with the Government of Lithuania having granted broad autonomy to the Jewish community, the relations between Lithuanians and Jews were rather friendly and based on tolerance, at least until 1924. The Ministry of Jewish Affairs and other bodies of Jewish self-governance that existed until 1924 were a unique expression of Jewish national-cultural autonomy. When the Ministry was abolished, a feature of Lithuanian Jewish national-cultural autonomy, distinguishing it from Jewish communities in neighbouring states, was lost. On the other hand, in 1924-1926, as Lithuanian nationalism gained strength and Vilnius was lost, the demands to use the Lithuanian language became more radical and Jewish national autonomy was abolished, the relations between the two nations became visibly strained.

3. Anti-Semitism in Lithuania grew in the 1930s, especially during the second half of the decade. It was conditioned by domestic factors (such as the impact of the world economic crisis on the Lithuanian economy, special favourable treatment of the Lithuanian industrial and commercial bourgeoisie by the state, competition between Jews and Lithuanians in the sectors of industry, crafts and commerce, anti-Semitic propaganda in the press and in propaganda leaflets) as well as external circumstances (such as anti-Semitic and racist propaganda originating from Germany). Mounting tension between Lithuanians and Jews was caused both by contemporary anti-Semitism, and traditional anti-Judaic attitudes, which also grew in strength during the 1930s.

4. The years of rule by Antanas Smetona (1927-1940) witnessed suppression of anti-Semitic outbursts and not a single anti-Jewish law was adopted. Until the very last days of the Republic of Lithuania Jews maintained their schools and social care agencies, which were financially maintained or supported by the government, their religious life remained unrestricted. This proves that Jewish cultural autonomy existed *de facto*.

During the thirties, Jews faced less anti-Semitism in Lithuania when compared to Poland, Romania, and Hungary, home to the majority of Jews in Central and Eastern Europe.

However, Antanas Smetona's Government provided special favours to Lithuanian businessmen and sought to push the Jews out from their positions in industry and trade by both economic and political means. Jews were essentially treated as second-class citizens, and, in general, were excluded from positions in governmental and municipal offices, in cultural agencies, in the military academy, the diplomatic corps, and in university departments, despite laws mandating equality. Although there were anti-Semitic incidents, inter-war Lithuania did not witness any deaths from pogroms.

5.   Relations between Lithuanians and Jews turned bitter during the years of the Soviet occupation (1940-1941). Anti-Semitism grew to a new, far more threatening level. Previous stereotypes, frequently invoked against Jews, such as "enemies of Christians" and "exploiters of Lithuanians", were now, in the minds of many Lithuanians, overshadowed by the new image of Jews based on a political rationale – "the traitors of Lithuania" and "collaborators with the occupiers". The word "Jew" often became synonymous with the term "Communist." Jewish members of the Communist party and of the Young Communist League (Komsomol) enabled the creation of the Jew-Communist stereotype; however, the number of Jewish members in the Communist Party was very insignificant compared to the total membership of the Lithuanian Jewish community[*].

6.   The leadership of the Lithuanian Activists Front, which embraced representatives of all political forces of Lithuania, cancelled "the right of welcome granted to the Jews by Vytautas the Great", and, resorting to threats ("to avoid the unnecessary casualties"), issued demands that Jews abandon the country and flee to Russia. The anti-Semitic proclamations issued by the LAF headquarters in Berlin as well as other documents made their way to Lithuania and had a significant impact on the attitudes of Lithuanians.

7. Documented research reveals that Jews did not play an especially significant role in the institutions of Soviet rule or in repressive institutions during 1940-1941[*]. Like all the other nations in Lithuania, Jews suffered from Soviet rule. The number of Jewish high schools was reduced by half, the Hebrew language was no longer permitted, and Saturday (the Jewish Sabbath) was no longer a holiday. Nationalisation of property caused the greatest harm to Jews. Nearly five hundred Jews were arrested in one year, and a total of 2,600 Jews suffered Soviet repression. Jews accounted for 13.5 per cent of the June 1941 deportees, while their share in the entire population of the country was about 7 per cent. Lithuania had a population of over three million in early 1941, including 208 400 Jews.

8.   Lithuanian hostility against Jews, which grew dramatically during the first Soviet period was conditioned by a number of factors, among which the following should be mentioned: (1) the differing geopolitical orientation of the two nations; for Jews, the

---

[*] See Appendix 1: statistical data on the actual involvement of Lithuanian citizens of Jewish nationality in the activities of the Communist Party.

[*] See Appendix 2 and 3: statistical data on the actual involvement of Lithuanian citizens of Jewish nationality in the activities of the Soviet repressive structures.

Soviets represented "a lesser evil" compared with Nazi Germany, while many Lithuanians looked to Germany to save them from Soviet terror; (2) the political and diplomatic defeats suffered by Lithuanians in the late thirties (the Polish ultimatum accepted in 1938, the surrender of the Klaipėda region to Germany in 1939, the refusal to march on Vilnius in September 1939, accepting the Red Army garrisons in October 1939, capitulation to the demands of the USSR in June 1940, collaboration with the occupation forces in the summer of 1940) caused a deep moral crisis in the Lithuanian nation, which sought scapegoats for these failures. This situation nurtured the widespread attitude that the Lithuanian Jews were mostly to blame for the misfortunes, which befell the country.

Chairman   Emanuelis Zingeris

Executive Director   Ronaldas Račinskas