

Translated from Lithuanian

Review
of the Work by **Dr Rimantas Zizas**
**Persecution of Non-Jewish Citizens of Lithuania,
Murder of Civilian Population (1941-1944)**

The article by Dr Rimantas Zizas deals with the persecution and murder of non-Jewish population of Lithuania during the national socialist occupation. Up to now, there has been a host of myths and legends around these issues in Lithuania, therefore, the work by Dr Zizas can be considered an important piece of history research.

An exhaustive overview of existing historiography is a clear sign that both the research conducted by Lithuanians during the Soviet period, and history articles published by the émigré Lithuanians were based on inflated numbers of victims. Moreover, the Soviet research did not distinguish between various groups of victims, it spoke only of "peace-loving Soviet citizens", thus, the systematic murder of the Jewish population of Lithuania was more or less suppressed. Likewise, the Lithuanian émigré literature was based on exaggerated figures of victims, not to mention adding together the victims of the Soviet and the national socialist occupations, Lithuania being portrayed as a victim of two murderous dictatorships. Research conducted in Lithuania after the restoration of independence was focused, primarily, on the Soviet period, therefore, non-Jewish victims of the national socialists rarely attracted researchers' attention.

Against this background, Dr Rimantas Zizas investigates the developments in the period from June 1941 till July 1944 mainly relying upon archival sources in Vilnius. His division is clear cut and well founded; the author describes all areas from the very first days of the war until the last days of the German rule.

When the Wehrmacht attacked the Soviet Union on 22 June 1941, it took them a few days to occupy Lithuania. Due to swift German invasion and poor Soviet resistance, civilian victims were few. German sources, which, unfortunately, have not been used by the author of the work, provide a further explanation of the German punitive actions in the first days of the war. Beyond any doubt, Dr Zizas is right in stressing that executions of civilian population by Germans (e.g. Abingia Village or Alytus) were in all cases caused by real or alleged fire attacks on German soldiers made by dispersed Red Army soldiers or partisans; however, one must bear in mind that German units had been warned about the alleged "Asian methods of fight" employed by the Soviets and yet before launching an attack they had been ordered to execute the severest punitive operations in case of an assault from the areas outside the front. As early as on 13 May 1941, the Order of the Fuhrer's headquarters said: "... the unit must respond to the attacks by hostile civilian population against the Wehrmacht, their families and accompanying persons by extreme measures applied locally, even by destroying the attacker... In the settlements which attacked the Wehrmacht craftily by setting up an ambush, collective violence operations must be carried out immediately if surrounding circumstances obstruct identification of individual criminals." With this situation in place, there was no surprise that Wehrmacht soldiers shot at resisting Lithuanians, because German units invading the country encouraged by their top commanders had to behave recklessly and brutally if at least a slightest suspicion existed. However, the fact that repressions were rather few in Lithuania, as Dr Zizas rightly emphasises, was related to the swift invasion of Germans and friendly welcome extended by Lithuanian people to German soldiers who were thought to be "liberators" from the Soviet rule.

At last, matters were settled with those who welcomed, supported, or worked for, the Soviet institutions. Dr Zizas draws a very plastic picture of events that turned persons suspected of collaboration into victims. First, the initial period, i.e. from 22 June 1941 to the beginning/middle of July, when the Soviet administration fell to pieces, and the German rule was not established yet, opened a free space of time which was used for a "rapid process". The author makes an important conclusion that Communists and their

collaborators accounted for the largest share of the non-Jewish victims, although Germans sometimes behaved even more moderately than Lithuanians. Dr Zizas mentions some cases when Germans released victims, however, they were shot down by the white-bands later. The total number of persons killed before 1944 could be as high as 1000 to 2000. In his analysis, Dr Zizas singles out the first days when the group of victims was defined politically, and the succeeding days, when Germans initiated systematic and racist motivated mass execution of Jews. This division of motives is slightly schematic, because at the very outset, political and racial motives were intermingled: on the very first days of the war, communist Jews had slimmer chances of survival than their Lithuanian colleagues in the Soviet party institutions. The author of the text should consider this issue in future.

In addition to the repressive operations following the armed operations by the Soviet partisans that were in line with the German scheme of punitive operations in the first days of the war and were mainly organised in the region of Vilnius, the study concentrates on German operations against resistance to mobilisation and forced labour as well as economic exploitation. Dr Zizas is absolutely correct in saying that the small size of the German administrative staff opened up a certain freedom of action to the Lithuanian administration pursuing its own objectives. Another important observation made by the author is that Nazi racial hierarchy placed Lithuanians above other remaining minorities, what was reflected in the conditions of life.

In relation to that, Dr Zizas writes (p.44) that Nazis were pragmatic in Lithuania. This description is too generic, because, certainly, persons like Hingst or Wulff, as old party friends, were, above all, criminals of racial belief, therefore, their participation in the Holocaust is doubtless. The "pragmatism", however, was probably manifested by the wish to keep Lithuania a peaceful rearguard country, therefore, they had to make certain concessions.

Whether it is worthwhile to speak about influential resistance to Nazis, in my opinion, (p.43) is a question open to debate: these chapters should be reviewed and softened once again; the passive resistance of Lithuanians strengthened only in 1943 and that was linked not only to the disappointment in German occupational policies, but also to the more and more evident loss of Germans after Stalingrad as well as to the possible return of the Red Army to Lithuania.

Dr Zizas describes the failure of the mobilisation to the Lithuanian SS-legion and succeeding German reaction in a constructive manner and in pointed phrases. At last, a mention is made of the notorious "agreement" with Lithuanian general councils concerning number of people provided for forced labour. Lithuanian agencies took the opportunity to deport, first of all, people who they regarded as socially "unwanted" element, i.e. criminal offenders, communists, Poles of Vilnius region, to Germany. With regard to all of these operations (e.g. hunt for and detention of Lithuanian intellectuals), I can absolutely agree with Dr Zizas that the use of the term "genocide" is totally impossible as the number of victims was very low in relative terms.

At the end of his work, Dr Zizas briefly describes the people who helped Red Army soldiers or Jews at the risk of losing their own property or even lives. Though they were not many, the inclusion of the destinies of the people who helped [Jews and Red Army soldiers] into Zizas's article is a positive fact, indeed. Therefore, in this context, I suggest that the well-known Memorandum of 9 November 1942 by Kazys Grinius et al. to Commissar General von Renteln should not be mentioned. The detailed document, first of all, concerned Germanisation of Lithuania and settlement of Lithuanian German emigrants; meanwhile the murder of Jews was mentioned only in one sentence. There was no indication that Germans used to detain people or put them under house arrest just for mentioning the Holocaust. This paragraph could be deleted without any problems.

Summing up, Dr Rimantas Zizas's work can be defined as a convincing and significant one that represents the first attempt to explain the legends about the scope of non-Jewish

victims of the German occupiers by introducing their historical background. The author draws a conclusion that thousands of people were killed by national socialists. Thus, it becomes yet more evident that national socialist occupational authorities attached great significance to the almost total annihilation of Jews in Lithuania. Jews were the only people who were killed solely for being Jews: this makes it yet more obvious that justifying the racist ideological motive for the mass murder is impossible.

Before concluding, let me make several other observations: alongside Jews, tens of thousands of arrested Red Army soldiers perished in the mass murder committed by national socialists on the Lithuanian soil. This crime has been researched and presented to the Commission by Mr Christopher Dieckmann. A reference to the work by Mr Dieckmann should also be made.

The author focuses on the number of the murdered mainly. Maybe, at the end of the work, a paragraph should be inserted on the people deported to Germany for forced labour, as this would answer the question on how many Lithuanian citizens fell victim to the manhunt, and if possible, what proportion of the forced labourers was accounted for by Poles, Russians or Lithuanians. Sometimes, too scarce attention is given to the ethnic affiliation of the other, non-Jewish, part of the population; particularly, the Polish residents of Vilnius region could be mentioned more frequently.

Joachim Tauber

Liuneberg

3. The text of footnote 163 in German is absolutely wrong, it should go as follows:

"Feiger Meuchelmord an Reichsdeutschen, Wilnaer Zeitung, 23.Mai 1942".