

## **Review of the study *The Upsurge of Anti-Semitism in Lithuania in the years of the Soviet Occupation, 1940-1941* of Liudas Truska**

by prof. Egidijus Aleksandravicius

The study by Truska is well documented and based on valid arguments. The author undertakes the task to reveal the causes of the rise of anti-Semitism in Lithuania and describe its key manifestations as well as prevalent motivations. Having acquainted himself with the majority of published sources and sufficiently well evaluated modern historiographic and popular approaches, he employs a number of new archival documents and challenges deep-rooted myths.

The text evidently shows that the materials available to Truska as well as his interpretation can be hardly encompassed into the framework of a short study. Considering the aforesaid and to the extent it is possible, he tries to define the scope of related issues and, thus, formulates his objectives: *1) to examine the situation of the Jews during the first Soviet Occupation and their role in the system of soviet government; 2) to analyse the Lithuanian-Jewish relations, i.e. the development of anti-Semitism from 1940 to 1941; 3) to reveal the reasons for the myth of the 'Jewish guilt' to appear* (p. 4). Such a formulation of objectives is fully grounded, although the formulation of the second issue might be questioned: do the Lithuanian-Jewish relations resemble the history of anti-Semitism? This can be supported if it represents a metaphorical emphasis, but in term of the study of history it is a defective matter which prevents multi-faceted research of the Lithuanian-Jewish relations.

The author deals with the first objective very persuasively. Having reached the limits of a statistical method, the study shows that the Jewish prevalence in soviet party and repressive structures should be out of the question. However, namely this argument is escalated in the disputes of previous years and modern times. The author thinks that it was on the contrary and that the majority of Jews and absolute majority the their organisations remained loyal to Lithuania in sight of the Soviet invasion. Although eventual opponents would draw their attention to the category of *Russian speaking population* which was not always transparent and the possibilities of its statistical analysis, the behaviour of the Jews causes no doubt. It surely could not provoke such a big wave of anti-Semitism. Therefore, in case of his first objective, Truska demonstrates the best qualities of positivist historiography in Lithuania.

Nevertheless, it is still questioned why such a harsh wave of anti-Semitism rose in Lithuania. Throughout centuries and turbulent decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in Western Europe Lithuania had remained relatively peaceful and tolerant. Thus, some statements in Truska's study seem to be controversial in the background of the earlier reviewed text by V. Vareikis: if the grand ideologists of Lithuanian anti-Semitism severely criticised the government of independent Lithuania for its failure to *curb the Jews and similar elements* (p.16), this fades the picture of Lithuanian pre-war nationalism as depicted in the text by Vareikis.

The author looks for the causes of this rise somewhere deeper than statistics are capable of reaching. This is not solely nationalist, extremist propaganda, which had previously been known to scholars. A reference can be made to the documents of the Lithuanian Activist Front (LAF), which appeared under the influence of various services of the Nazi Germany. By the way, if we approached the LAF documents prepared in Germany critically, we would find arguments for the statements that some of those proclamations had been *improved* and made more radical in Lithuania itself before they were disseminated and multiplied when the war broke out. In my opinion, some of the assumptions by the author have their future in further research and aim at restoring the picture of how the Lithuanians felt at the beginning of the war. *It is easier for the nation, as well as a man, to recover from the downfall when responsibility rests on somebody else* states Truska (p. 21). The failure of active resistance to the Soviet Army, experience of scornful weakness facing the superpowers of the world, violence, deportations, and degrading of human dignity made the nation seek for simple ways to recover losses. According to the author, weakness and injuring experience as well as sorrow, rage and shame which took over the Lithuanians at the *beginning* of the war, *insistently called to find a scapegoat*. The Jews and the others who were weak and harmed were made scapegoats easily. Being at a loss and looked down by superpowers, the Lithuanians also became the nation which was easily manipulated by the superior and became almost unheard in the bloody rage of mind and heart. It is important that wise, based on arguments, and far-reaching considerations by Truska had a continuation. On the other hand, methodological arsenal of traditional historiography (particularly that Lithuanian) may be insufficient in this process. The elements of history of emotions, behaviour, ideas and mentalities should necessarily find their place in the research of the Holocaust in Lithuania. In this respect, Prof. Truska undoubtedly contributes to the good start of such an undertaking.