

Review of the study by Dr. Vygantas Vareikis *Preconditions of Holocaust. Anti-Semitism in Lithuania in 19th century – first half of 20th century (till June 15 1940)*

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The absence of conclusions makes the reviewing of the article rather complicated. In my opinion, the Secretariat should require unconditionally that the authors of commissioned research papers present the conclusions as well. It is the conclusions that the Commission firstly needs, while the text (the research) is a mere substantiation of the conclusions.

In his research, Dr. Vareikis presented extensive factual material on anti-Semitism, its development and intensification in the 19th cent. Lithuania and during the first four decades of the 20th cent. However, in my opinion, a broader theoretical generalisation of the factual material is lacking. I should think that the development of anti-Semitism should be analysed within the context of the situation of the Jews in Lithuania and of the relations of Jews and Lithuanians on the whole. Otherwise, a distorted picture is drawn, as it happened in the case of Dr. Vareikis' text.

A good or bad situation of the Jews, strong or minor anti-Semitism, these are relative things. They may be judged only after comparing the situation in Lithuania with that in other countries, while the work under review does not include the comparison.

Even Jewish authors admit that the situation of Jews in Lithuania till WWI was better than that in other East European countries (Poland, Ukraine, and Russia) because Lithuanians were not burdened by a strong anti-Semitic tradition. It may be first of all explained by the fact that most bitter enemies of Lithuanians were Russians and Poles; the national Lithuanian bourgeoisie did not exist yet and, at the same time, the Jews faced no strong competition in the non-agricultural businesses in which it dominated; there was no flow of Lithuanian farmers to the cities either. Thus, the Jews were more allies than enemies to Lithuanians. The author does not perceive either the significance of Lithuanian-Jewish co-operation in electing the Russian Duma as the start of a political union between the nations (only several lines are allotted to it in the work).

The work under review evades the “golden age” of Jews, or the “honey moon” in Lithuanian-Jewish relations. I am referring to the period from 1918 to 1924 and even from 1918 to 1926 partly, when a personal autonomy of Jews, a unique phenomenon that had no analogues in the world, was brought into existence in Lithuania. The work by Dr. Vareikis does not reveal a very positive role the phenomenon played in the establishment of the Lithuanian State.

In the thirties of 20th cent., the Lithuanian-Jewish relations entered a qualitatively new stage. The Lithuanian Businessmen Union, considered by Dr. Vareikis only a professional organisation that fought Jewish competitors, turned, in my opinion, into a nationalist Lithuanian movement aiming at expropriating the Jewry. The author does not focus on the formation of the radical Activist Union, promising nothing good for the Jews and comprising the Voldemarininkai, Christian Democrats and even peasants,

which ended in the establishing of the Lithuanian Activist Front in the autumn of 1940. At the end of the thirties, the “Young Nationalists” also joined the ideology of the Voldemarininkai. However, due to a number of reasons, first of all the civilised attitude of Smetona to the Jews (disclosed incorrectly in the article by Dr.Vareikis), even at the end of the thirties, no anti-Jewish laws were adopted in Lithuania and no mass anti-Semitic organisations (Iron Guards in Romania, “crossed arrows” in Hungary) were established, no drastic anti-Jewish excesses took place. Due to this, even in this period, the situation of the Jews in Lithuania was better than that in a majority of other East European countries.

The Lithuanian-Jewish relations entered a new threatening stage in the first Soviet period (1940-1941). However, Dr. Vareikis does not research this period and concludes the research with June 15 1940, for reasons incomprehensible to me.

The last remark I would like to make is on the proportions of the work. As much as half of the work (till p. 13) is allotted to 19th cent. and the start of the 20th cent. (till 1914). I should think that the Commission shall need one conclusion on anti-Semitism in the country till WWI, three or five conclusions on the period of independent Lithuania and one or two conclusions on the Soviet period (1940-1941). The same proportions should be assumed in the work as well.

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