

Review of the study by Arūnas Bubnys “Lithuanian police battalions and the Holocaust (1941 – 1943)”

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The part of Lithuanian self-defense (police) battalions in the Jew genocide (Holocaust) in Lithuania and beyond has yet been the subject of very few studies. On the other hand, it is one of the most important and sore issues in the Lithuanian – Jew relationship that asks for investigation into the actual part of the battalions in the crimes committed against the nation of Jews. Therefore, the actuality and the necessity of Dr. A. Bubnys' study are beyond any doubt.

The author makes strong reference to archive resources to deliver new useful systematic data serving as a basis for further statements, ideas, and conclusions.

However, the conclusion-type text is dominated by detailed facts about creation, and organizational structure of the battalions, rather than about their methods of participation in the Holocaust. The title of the article itself could also be targeted a little bit more in this direction, too. The goals of the analysis are also quite narrow: the author limits the study to the “quantitative” tasks to establish the numbers of battalions and soldiers participating in the slaughter, the direct and indirect means of engagement, and the numbers of people killed. All this is of course important, however, it is not the figures (at least some), or the figures themselves that matter. On the other hand, arriving at such figures is a task hard beyond imagining, one almost impossible, and could hardly be ever achieved for the lack of proper resources.

Taking account of the fact that the involvement of the battalions in executions was the dominant factor in creating the image of Lithuanians as a nation of Jew-killers, the goals of the analysis should have included elucidation of the processes, conditions and reasons that predetermined the participation of the battalions in the killings, as well as motivation of the actions and behavior of war criminals, the reaction of the society to the atrocious aftermath of the Holocaust, etc. (because even some of the leaders of the most loyal henchmen of the Germans Woldemarists objected to the battalions participating in the slaughter, although a part of the Lithuanian society was impartial to the tragedy of the Jewish nation). The KGB analysts and the soviet historiography had already tried to give answers to the questions that the author has put forward for analysis. The author, however, does not discuss the results of such endeavors (the study by J. Vicas, the document compilation *Mass Murder in Lithuania*, the publication *The Murdered Accuse* (Vilnius, 1963, p.208), etc.). The soviet studies published are far from being worthless. Another major flaw of the paper is that it has little if any reference to the analyses of foreign authors (with one exception of the German historian K. Stang).

The author does not question the authenticity of the KGB documents that provide the major grounds for his study. Further, the reasons for him following one or another evidence (out of many) are not clear. The KGB archive material is very diverse and controversial, it contains a lot of interesting details indicating that not all of the soldiers of the battalions would shoot voluntarily and bearing implications that the KGB investigators made them give false evidence, etc.

One of the major defects of the paper is that the scale of the slaughter in Lithuania's province is not revealed to its full extent. In particular, the list of the killings done by the 13th Battalion (only 15 locations enumerated), as well as the 10th and some other battalions strikes as being incomplete. In Kaišiadoriai, Jews were killed by Germans and the Lithuanian *ancillary police soldiers* from Kaunas (LCVA data), the parties involved in the Eišiškės killing were dominated by the *Lithuanian troops*, in Virbalis, Jews were shot by the *self-defense squad* from Vilkaviškis, in Pasvalys – by the *self-defense squad* from Panevėžys, etc.

The generalized data on the number of the killed are quite dubious. The author claims that in Byelorussia, the 12th battalion gunned down 46 thousand people (the figure taken from the KGB resources). The history of arriving at such a hideously impressive figure is fascinating. It was recorded in fall 1941 in the diary of the General Secretary of the Lithuanian Nationalist Party (LNP) Z.Blynas and was stated in the LNP letter to P. Kubiliūnas dated November 7, 1971 calling for a *firm protest* against the 12th Battalion's *feats in Byelorussia* as ones *humiliating Lithuania and Lithuania's troops* (after the war, this figure came into the KGB circulation and was used in the 12th Battalion's case).

However, this battalion was not the only one to be involved in the killings in Byelorussia, where Latvian, Ukrainian, and other units shot Jews.

Data are available that in Byelorussia (e.g. in Slonim) Jews were shot by the soldiers from *another* Lithuanian battalion (maybe the 3rd? – R.Z.) from Vilnius, as well as by the *execution squad* of the 13th Battalion that, according to A.Špokevičius, Germans are assumed to later have liquidated themselves.

The author provides a long quote from a letter by the Slutsk commissioner H.Carl dated October 30, 1941, where the commissioner describes his astonishment at the *atrocities* of Lithuanians. One should not trust impartiality of such letters without knowing the circumstances that prevailed at the time they were written. There was a lot of friction among and differences in tactics of a variety of German departments and officials (a commissioner from Liepoja (Latvia) also was exasperated at the exposed and brutal killing of Jews). While the commissioner of Slutsk was bewildered with the atrocity of Lithuanians, the communication officer of the 12th Battalion demanded of the latter ruthless battle against the partisans and elimination of Jews.

Moreover, the author claims that the 3rd Battalion of Vilnius was often called forth when it came to *special actions* – carnage. The author may be right, however, this statement can be put to question. The head of the 3rd Battalion (and later of the 5th and of the 256th) was Pr.Ambraziūnas. He was arrested and interrogated in October 1950, then in 1964, and, however (opposite to A.Impulevičius, for instance), was not sentenced to die. In general, Germans were not eager to trust the battalions made up of *soviet prisoners of war* (just what the 3rd Battalion was).

The number of the battalions involved (both directly and indirectly) in the killings could hardly be limited to that provided by the author. There are data that the 15th, the 254th, and other battalions created in 1941-1942 that the author makes no reference to as attending the Holocaust, might actually have been used for executions of Jews. While executing anti-partisan actions and cleaning the woods, the battalions would find fugitive Jews and eliminate them.

There are certain discrepancies that can be observed in the paper. Somehow, the author does not include the *Lietuva* Battalion, which was created in Germany and transported into Lithuania, into the overall list of police battalions (maybe there are motives?), claims that the 10th Battalion was disbanded in 1943 (although data indicate that this battalion was sent East and fought at the Volchov front-line), does not mention the fact that the 12th Battalion was merged with the 15th Battalion, and provides suspiciously large figures when describing the casualties suffered by the 7th Battalion (approximately 50 per cent of its personnel) when trying to break out of the Stalingrad cauldron.

On the whole, the study by Dr. A.Bubnys leaves a controversial impression. In the light of the historiography situation it, of course, is to be given a positive evaluation. On the other hand, the complicated and burning problem (both in terms of science and politics) should have been enlightened in a wider context of Lithuanian-Jew relationship, the Holocaust, creation of Lithuanian military units, and the World War 2 in general, and the related issues could have been given a deeper thought. The general data on the part of the battalions in the Holocaust and the numbers of people killed are not completely grounded or motivated and are far from being

definitive. The International Commission for Assessment of Nazi and Soviet Crimes, as well as the general public, should be presented with carefully developed versatile studies. Apparently, the author should apply more accuracy to the conclusions and the results of this investigation.