

Analysis: A sinister scheme to devalue the Holocaust is gathering steam

By Efraim Zuroff, January 8, 2010

The Jewish Chronicle

The question of how Lithuania deals with its Holocaust past has simmered for 18 years, ever since it gained independence. But in the past few weeks it has become crucial, due to Lithuania's campaign to obtain recognition that Communism is the equivalent of Nazism.

The current controversy kicked off on November 30, 2009, when Lithuanian PM Andrius Kubilius was the guest on BBC's Hardtalk.

Mr Kubilius had the bad luck of being interviewed by Jonathan Charles, who in 2008 had produced an excellent radio documentary on the worldwide hunt for Nazi war criminals and so was well aware of Lithuania's abysmal record.

He challenged Mr Kubilius to explain the fact that not a single Lithuanian Nazi war criminal had been punished since independence.

The PM's plight on UK television may have gone unnoticed in London, but it certainly registered in Vilnius. Thus three days later, Justice Minister Remigijus Šimašius rushed to his defense in an outrageous statement which received wide local coverage.

"The fact that many Jews were murdered in Lithuania does not mean that Lithuanians are a nation of Jewshooters." On the contrary — he said — unlike the US, the Soviet Union and the UK, all of which were reluctant to admit fleeing Jewish refugees, "in Lithuania, there was no persecution or oppression of the Jews" prior to the Shoah.

To accuse Lithuania of antisemitism or collaboration is an insult to the "hundreds of people of Lithuania who saved Jews", he added.

And besides, any assistance to the Nazis was not rendered "in any official manner".

It would be hard to imagine a more brazen revision of history. Thousands of Lithuanians volunteered to help implement the Final Solution, partially explaining why Lithuania had the highest victimology rate in Europe (96.4 per cent).

It is the only country in which collaboration in mass murder of Jews by shooting was so widespread that a special term, žydsaudžiai (shooters of Jews), was coined for it.

Add the absurd positive comparison to the UK, US and Russia — three countries which defeated Nazi Germany — you have a typical example of the distorted history of the annihilation of European Jewry which is endemic in post Communist Europe. No one there would dare to deny the Shoah, but few have the courage to admit the pernicious role of their own local collaborators.

It is these lies that help buttress the current campaign led by the Baltic countries to achieve official recognition that the crimes of Communism are just as bad as those of the Nazis.

Formulated in the “Prague Declaration” of June 2008, which calls for a joint commemoration day for the victims of Communism and Nazism (making Holocaust Remembrance Day superfluous) and for a research institute which would study Nazism and Communism as a common phenomenon (making institutes like Yad Vashem redundant), the campaign is gathering steam.

It will constitute a major challenge to the status of the Holocaust as a unique tragedy.

Under these circumstances, Israel’s invitation to Lithuanian Foreign Minister Vygaudas Ušackas to speak at the Global Forum on Combatting Antisemitism last month is difficult to understand.

If he were coming to Jerusalem to announce that his government was stopping its campaign to equate Communism with Nazism and that, henceforth, every effort would be made to present a historically accurate version of the Shoah in Lithuania, it would have been reasonable.

Instead Mr Ušackas misrepresented the crimes committed by local collaborators as “sending Jews to their death” — ie, at the hands of others.

So why was he invited? In Israel, he did urge EU diplomats to “stop talking too much about the Middle East”, and said he believes that Israeli PM Netanyahu “wants peace and genuinely wants a Palestinian state”. Given Mr Ušackas’s highly questionable grasp of history, it is doubtful whether these statements can be considered of any value.

Thus an important truth, revealed thanks to a well informed BBC presenter, was squandered in Jerusalem, to the detriment of the Holocaust’s memory.

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Last updated: 11:20am, January 8 2010