
Sir,

It is precisely because of our esteem for Barry Rubin's enormous erudition in Middle Eastern affairs that we should grant credence to his potent arguments about the desirability for Israel to forge meaningful and long-lasting alliances with the Central and Eastern European countries that are now part of the European Union, NATO and hence, the Western alliance. In his article "Unfinished Business and Exploited Opportunities," Rubin takes the bold step of going right to the heart of the problem: the complex of Holocaust- and antisemitism-related issues. Where his argument does not stand up to scrutiny is not on the need for developing these relations, but rather on the conditions and underlying assumptions.

The proportions of the Jewish populations annihilated in the Baltic states — some 95 percent in Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia — were the highest in Europe. This fact can partly be attributed to the overwhelming role of thousands of local volunteers (now often portrayed as "anti-Soviet freedom fighters" in these countries). These locals cheerfully killed their neighbors and plundered their property and

possessions. So adept were the Baltic killers that the Germans imported Jews from far afield for extermination there—and exported these murderers to serve as executioners of Jews in other parts of Europe (including, for example, in the Warsaw Ghetto).

But none of that is cause to blame further generations, to assign collective guilt to entire nations, or to forget for one moment the inspirational courage of those noble Balts who risked everything to just do the right thing and hide a Jewish neighbor. What, then, is the problem?

After some years of post-Soviet democratic freedom to explore and investigate the painful Holocaust history in the Baltics—a cause admirably taken up by bold individuals and NGOs alike—the Baltic governments embarked on the shoddy path of Orwellian-grade “One View of History Imposed by Law.” In this they were aided by politically ambitious and disreputable “local show Jews,” who played their roles in return for political advancement. The old antisemitic canard about all Jews being Communists and getting what they deserved (“the 1940 Soviet occupation came before the 1941 German occupation”; in shorthand: “1940 comes before 1941”) has remained vital for maintaining popularity with the far-right electorate, which plays an important role in politics in these countries.

Before the turn of the millennium, all three Baltic states set up government-funded “red-brown commissions”—in effect, truth commissions that sought to persuade the EU to accept the notion that Nazism and Communism were absolutely equal.

Among the means employed to achieve this end were:

- legislated redefinition of the idea of genocide to include just about any Soviet crimes;
- intrigues against individuals and NGOs who did not agree with that policy;
- campaigns of defamation against the Wiesenthal Center’s Efraim Zuroff for daring to ask that Nazi war criminals stand trial in their own country’s courts and that Holocaust history be taught accurately; and
- expensive campaigns to hoodwink the entire European Parliament into promoting documents like the 2008 Prague Declaration, which would write the Holocaust out of history and replace it with a cunning paradigm of the “Double Genocide” theory (exposed for what it is, *inter alia*, by Yehuda Bauer, John Mann, Heidmarie Uhl, and Efraim Zuroff, and fervently protested by Holocaust survivors’ groups).

I have referred to the East European state-sponsored movement to distort the Holocaust even while (or especially while) studying and teaching it, as “Holocaust

obfuscation.” It is financed to the degree that it can easily manipulate and even deceive distinguished (but in Eastern Europe—naive) representatives of the Holocaust Museum in Washington, Yad Vashem, the International Task Force, and some Western diplomats. I have seen this repeatedly during my eleven years of residence in Vilnius (most recently when a Holocaust Museum emissary appointed researchers who have obfuscated and minimized the Holocaust as local Holocaust instructors funded by the West).

Lithuanian authorities went even further than the rest. After tricking founding Yad Vashem director Yitzhak Arad (born 1926) into joining their country’s red-brown commission, in 2006 he himself was pursued by prosecutors in a kangaroo war crimes investigation. This was based on the fact that after surviving the ghetto, Arad fled into the forest where he joined the Soviet-sponsored anti-Nazi partisans. After an international outcry, “part” of the Arad “investigation” was dropped in 2008, in an embittered prosecutors’ statement calling on the public to supply new evidence. As if that were not enough, in 2008, police came looking for Dr. Rachel Margolis (born 1921) and Fania Yocheles Brantsovsky (born 1922) on similar grounds. To this day, the two women, heroes of the free world who helped defeat Hitler’s forces in their native country, have neither been charged nor cleared, a veritable stain on justice in the European Union. One of them, Dr. Margolis of Rechovot, who first brought to light the Sakowicz Ponary Diary, is prevented from returning one last time, as she wishes, to her native Lithuania.

Since 2008, in all three Baltic capitals there have been regular city-center police-protected pro-Nazi marches sporting fascist symbols. Some of these marches were supported by major political parties in adulation and commemoration of Nazi collaborators. Moreover, the “Genocide Museum” in the center of Vilnius does not mention the word “Holocaust,” but it merrily displays 1950s antisemitic cartoons without curatorial comment.

In late June 2010, Lithuania’s president shamefully signed into law a bill that would impose jail sentences of up to two years upon those who would deny Soviet or Nazi genocide. In other words, they would jail those who would say that there was one genocide in Lithuania—the Holocaust—and that Soviet crimes, while horrific, did not amount to genocide in Lithuania, where the population actually grew during Soviet misrule. With the magnificent exception of Leonidas Donskis, a Lithuanian patriot of multicultural heritage and his country’s most brilliant philosopher (and now Lithuania’s lone Liberal party member in the European Parliament), the dissident voices in the country concerning Holocaust revisionism and antisemitism have virtually all gone silent. It has been painful to see the feeling of freedom of speech sink right through the floor when it comes to these issues. Some Lithuanian truth-tellers have been intimidated into silence by

career destruction or job loss. Some have turned and now work with government agencies. Others opt for westward migration.

In May 2010, a Lithuanian court legalized public displays of swastikas on the grounds that the swastika is a symbol of the nation's historic legacy and not a Nazi symbol. This is emblematic of what is happening in Lithuania today. In 2008, Nazi and Soviet symbols had both been banned by law. (In reality, the ban on the hammer and sickle only affected aged anti-Nazi war veterans who used to enjoy their annual celebrations.) In 2010, the ban on the Soviet and Nazi symbols was "slightly modified" so as to exclude "just" the swastika. This is the actual result on the ground of the activities of the red-equals-brown movement in Eastern Europe. Period.

Today, there are three possible options that Israel has in dealing with the Baltic states:

One: "We will not develop our Baltic relations until these issues are resolved." In adopting such a stance, Israel, a country that did so much to retrieve remains of two citizens from Lebanon, would be demonstrating that it was willing to defend the honor of two living aged Israeli citizens. Arad and Margolis, both Holocaust survivors, and heroes of the anti-Nazi resistance, are being condemned to eternity as suspected war criminals by a far-right antisemitic prosecution service in an East European country as part of a plot to downgrade the Holocaust in European history. Not one of Israel's current "partners" in Lithuania has publicly condemned these kangaroo investigations by antisemitic prosecutors.

Two: "We will develop relations, tourism, commerce, and other productive contacts while making clear that we do not accept Holocaust revisionism or legalized antisemitism or persecution of survivors. Whoever said that tourists of country x have to agree with all the policies of nice-country-to-visit y?" That is the position that should emerge from Rubin's own solid arguments about Israel's need for alliances in this part of the world, and one to which I can readily subscribe. Verily, only good could come from many more Lithuanians and Israelis visiting each others' countries and building new personal, commercial, and strategic relationships. (Full disclosure: In my eleven years as a resident of central Vilnius, I have found its residents to be delightful, open, and good-humored; I do not blame them for the vicious campaigns of antisemitism and Holocaust obfuscation being run by an elite establishment of government, academic, and media figures. Israelis and Lithuanians have much to see, do, learn and enjoy in each others' countries.)

Three: the stance that Rubin takes, in effect, is, alas: "To the deuce with survivors, accurate Holocaust history, and antisemitism; let us sign on merrily to the Baltics'

every last wish and whim: Let them accuse survivors, legalize swastikas, make illegal the view that the Holocaust was the genocide in their country, and wow, once they have us on board for their Prague Declaration, Israel will have fantastic new support.”

Such friendships, based on the surrender of the integrity of one partner, are doomed to rapid demise and bitter disappointment.

Prof. Dovid Katz
Vilnius
