

“The House of European Histories” is Supported by a Controversial Museum

by Roland Binet

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An association created within the European Parliament, “The House of European History” informs by means of its website ‘Reconciliation of European Histories’ (<http://eureconciliation.wordpress.com>) that one of its goals is to “ensure continuity of the process of evaluation of totalitarian crimes and equal treatment and non-discrimination of victims of all totalitarian regimes.”

Among the institutions supporting that initiative, there is the Occupation Museum of Riga in Latvia. I saw the picture of Mr Barroso in the entrance hall of that museum devoted to showing what the three occupations of Latvia were like. It is an impressive museum due to the quality of its pictures, videos, exhibits and information panels that are permanently on display there.

It is to be pointed out that if the lion’s share is devoted to the crimes committed by the Soviets, the portion devoted to the Shoah is somewhat restricted. With regard to the Holocaust, among others, there is — dominantly displayed — a very-well known picture taken at Liepaja, in the dunes of Skede, showing two women, two young girls and a child hiding her head behind the right flank and arm of her mother. All are in underwear a few instants before their death by bullet. Five poor women and girls among the 70,000 Jewish victims of that country. The name of the Latvian *Viktors Arajs* is indicated, that man having created a commando under the aegis of the SD, responsible, according to some sources, of the murder of between 26,000 and 60,000 Jews.

One could believe that the balance between victims of Communist and Nazi crimes has been upheld, were there not other troubling facts both for the museum and for Latvia more generally speaking.

There are, first, these pictures: one of the arrival of the German troops in Riga with the caption “after one year of terror, the population greets the Germans as liberators” and then those of Latvians in SS uniforms. There is a book in their honor on sale at the reception desk of the museum. There is, too, that annual commemoration on March, 16, in Riga, also glorifying the SS who fought against Bolshevism.

What had Efraim Zuroff to say regarding the Shoah in Latvia? “A significant part of the murdered Jews in the three Baltic states were killed by Balts, not by Germans or Austrians (...). These three small countries have thus greatly contributed to the liquidation of European Jewry.” What had the same Zuroff to say about the latest march of SS obedience on March 16th, 2010?

“In reality, Tuesday’s ceremony was in certain respects only the tip of a very dangerous iceberg that is attempting to rewrite the history books and create a false symmetry of equalisation of Communist and Nazi crimes (...). Latvia’s foreign minister Maris Riekstins issued an official statement in which he attacked my criticism of the march and attempted to equate the suffering of all the victims of the Second World War, as if there was no difference between those supporting Nazism and those opposing it.”

SUBJECTIVITY

My personal study of the Shoah in Latvia and the consultation of abundant documentation, historical, testimonial and on the Internet, have taught me that the Arajs Commando and the Germans were not the only groups answerable for the destruction of the Jews of Latvia. There were civilians, policemen, members of self-proclaimed defence groups (*Aizsargi*, *Perkonkrust*), from the Latvian auxiliary Police Battalions, the *Schutzmannschaften*, the *Hiwis* and from the *Trawniki* (Soviet war prisoners recruited for the Nazis’ evil deeds).

And, on the other hand, at the Occupation Museum, I bought last September a book with the evocative title *Unpunished Crimes – Latvia Under Three Occupations* (Memento – Daugavas Vanagi). Chapter II deals with the “Soviet and Nazi occupations”. It is 194 pages long. Five pages are devoted to the Holocaust.

When you search on Google for *Daugavas Vanagi* you realise very quickly that its unique goal is the remembrance of and assistance to the Latvian SS Legion members.

Would it not be useful for Mr Barroso to distance himself publicly from an institution such as the Occupation Museum in Riga? That, even if it recommends the “equal treatment and non-discrimination of victims of all totalitarian regimes” practices a bias within its permanent exhibition that comes close to the “Rewriting of History” as a specialist of the Shoah and of Latvia during the Holocaust would say...