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# Patriotic Youth March: Is There a Basis for Accusations of Nazism?

by pievaa

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Freedom, democracy. These are probably the most used words in the media. Strikes, marches and parades are ever more frequently becoming a means of expressing one's opinion, protest, and to demand changes. Every year there is a march organized on March 11 on Gediminas Prospect. Some say it is an expression of neo-Nazism, others that it is a celebration of patriotism and a means of bringing society's attention to the problem of the extinction of the ethnic identity of Lithuania.

"The march is a beautiful and laudable event on our part, on the part of Lithuanians and patriots, not intended to demonstrate intolerance to someone, but to mark an important day in Lithuania's history and to show unity," a passer-by on the street said when asked about the march.

Of course, there is immediately a question on how to understand the march of March 11, 2008, when a large group of skinheads carried a flag decorated with a swastika and a skull and shouted "Juden raus," which translated to Lithuanian means "Jews get out," and other antisemitic and racist slogans.

After these events reporters got work slandering ALL patriotic youth of Lithuania and there was a barrage of reports in the media that this event is, according to them, Lithuania's greatest shame. Defenders of human rights hurled accusations at the most active marchers and pre-trial investigations began.

"One incident alone doesn't mean anything. Because it was carried out only by the consent of people, it is distant from street fighting or riots by basketball fans. We don't decide on an entire system based on these. All the more, we celebrate patriotism through joint forces," the speaker said.

It is often said: “Don’t judge a book by its cover.” – Truly, one event cannot hang the Nazi label on all patriots. But there is another side to all this: ideas don’t occur quickly and only then. The people who spoke out in favor of racism and that specific attitude to other ethnicities during the march “ripened” a long time ago. So it is self-evident that these ideas won’t disappear quickly. But the speaker recalled how he marched in the February 16 [fascist] march in Kaunas, how he felt a great pleasure and no desire to sow ethnic discord. So maybe after all it isn’t as it appears?

Nazism as an ideology began to form long before Hitler came to power, but it was he who finally formed the cult of the leader and the chauvinist ideas. Hitler exalted the exceptionalness of his people and persecuted other peoples. One can apply the historical facts to the current situation: many of the skinheads who marched in the march said just that, that they didn’t want other nationalities in Lithuania. They chanted “Lithuania for Lithuanians.”

On the other hand, who then needs the march? We live in a democratic society and the Constitution proclaims the right to freedom of speech. Just as the Constitution says that people of other races and ethnicities shouldn’t be discriminated against in the state. “The march is primarily needed for the consolidation of patriotic forces in attempting to stop ever-spreading tendencies of cosmopolitanism and spiritual impoverishment of the nation. We are happy about the freedom that was so hard to win and will always oppose plans by the imperialists of Brussels and Moscow to demoralize, to denationalize and finally to destroy Lithuanian statehood,” Lithuanian Nationalist Center chairman and march organizer Ričardas Čekutis says [Mr. Čekutis holds a senior position at the state-funded Genocide Research Center of Lithuania in old-town Vilnius. – Trans.]

This isn’t the first year that Simon Wiesenthal Center director and self-titled “Nazi hunter” Efraim Zuroff has tried to ban the march. It’s obvious that the decision to no longer allow the march would anger not just the skinheads themselves but also a portion of society. If we call ourselves a free and democratic society, then shouldn’t we behave democratically? Of course it would be anti-humane to approve racial discrimination, but march participants talk about the desire to preserve Lithuanian statehood, culture and language. And there really is reason for concern.

Recently one of the biggest vote getters in the Vilnius municipal elections, Polish party leader Valdemaras Tomasevskis, said the Polish ethnic minority isn't being respected in Lithuania. Older people fear that soon Lithuanians themselves will become foreign in their own country. And after all, compatriots who have emigrated don't demand Lithuanian be written next to the English names of streets. That's why the problem of ethnic identity and patriotism in general has arisen. While many Lithuanians slur the government and country where they live, the so-called skinheads love the country and are trying to ensure that the prognoses that states such as Lithuania won't exist after several decades won't come to pass.

On the other hand, the neo-Nazi movement that had formed in Europe does have a greater or lesser influence on the patriotic ideology of Lithuania. The only difference is that abroad it is much more radical. Very recently four young men in the Czech Republic threw three Molotov cocktails into a house of Roma in the eastern town of Vitkov just one day before the 120th birthday of Adolf Hitler, the leader of Nazi Germany during the time of World War II. The court sentenced them to 20 years' imprisonment. Applying this event to the realities of Lithuania, we can just be glad that such things still aren't happening here. But Nazi ideas are spreading ever more [widely and are becoming attractive to young people. Perhaps one day young people of radical views won't confine themselves to marching and chanting?

The question arises as to whether we can call the skinheads of Lithuania Nazis or neo-Nazis. The difference between Hitlerian national-socialism and Lithuanian forms of "patriotism" are that so far Lithuanians are only using their right to public expression during patriotic holidays. But however sad it may be, society is keeping silent that these same skinheads aren't especially peaceful in the underground.

Only a few events have been described in the media about attempts to prove through violence that it is better to live in Lithuania without people of other ethnicities. But many cases haven't been made public or simply aren't known. Hitler's followers believed in the greatness of their people, and so do the Lithuanian skinheads. Both parties don't want other ethnicities in their country. Both are inclined to use violence to demonstrate that, not peaceful means.

Of course it wouldn't be intelligent to apply the label of violent people to all skinhead patriots. There are many Lithuanian patriots who spread really beautiful and in no way chauvinist ideas for preserving the Nation. Ričardas Čekutis says "the information we disseminate is systematically blocked, this is how an erroneous image of the patriotic youth attending our events is composed." However unfortunate it might be, there is very little positive [said in the media?] about the march and patriotism in general. It seems the media and society don't want to know the other side of all this. On the other hand, marchers are very reluctant to share their thoughts and make no attempt to destroy the stereotypes about their activity. So it is not strange that a negative opinion is formed in society of the patriotic marches and that the concept of patriotism is becoming warped in general.

Can one say that patriotism and the declaration of patriotic ideas in Lithuania has become distorted? "The majority don't understand what patriotism is and where it hides. It is difficult for a student to understand that when he reads Maironis, that instant he is a patriot. I believe the public sector greatly distorted the understanding of patriotism. We constantly see that a real patriot is someone who watches basketball, roots for Lithuania and after it is all over drinks Lithuanian beer," Aistė Grajauskaitė, member of the Lithuanian student parliament and chair of the cultural committee, said.

Truly, little is said about patriotism in the schools. The strangest thing is that neither Maironis nor Lithuanian history in general raise any interest among students. We can see from this how the future generation is concerned with the future of the Homeland. On the other hand, if we label patriotic youth Nazis, then at the same time we can call Kudirka, Basanavičius, Smetona or even Maironis Nazis, although they brought Lithuania to independence.

Skinheads say they are trying to preserve the dying Lithuanian culture, although it seems that that is no longer needed. But the situation today says otherwise.

The other side of patriotic youth needs to be mentioned as well. For example, the Zygeiviai Club of Vilnius University. This is a not-for-profit organization uniting all young people who like to travel and love their country. They travel around the world and also visit the most beautiful sites in Lithuania. It is interesting and nice that Zygeiviai Club members place the Lithuanian flag on the summits of mountains, name unnamed mountains

with Lithuanian names and cherish Lithuanian traditions. [The chairman of the Zygeiviai Club is the fascist mathematician and tourism expert Kestutis Ceponis, Young Lithuania candidate for parliament and member of board of directors of Lithuanian Nationalist Center – Trans.]

Also, the Council of Lithuanian Youth Organizations annually does a project for instilling civic-mindedness and patriotism called Mission Siberia. It's goal is to provide modern youth the opportunity to show their patriotic side to society. Every year expeditions to Siberia are organized and the graves of Lithuanian deportees are refurbished there, and contact is made with Lithuanians who are still living in Siberia. They don't need to march the streets, so no one appears in society calling those young people racists and Nazis. Where is the line between chauvinist ideas and patriotism?

“Only a patriotically predisposed person cherishing the culture and traditions of his people is capable of understanding a person from another people [nation/ethnicity],” Ričardas Čekutis says. It is nowhere declared that other ethnicities shouldn't be respected. Finally, tolerance of other cultures is created when the foreign culture isn't adopted, but is understood as unique. Isolated incidents of racist attacks shouldn't drown out the mission of patriotic youth, but at the same time it isn't right to blindly accept everything that smells suspiciously of Nazism.

*DELFI is not responsible for the content of this text, because it is the subjective opinion of readers!* [But, as readers can see from the link at the top of this document, it is presented as a full-fledged news or opinion article with image, despite being pseudonymous – Trans.]