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# Taking an Interest in Nazi and Soviet Crimes is a Response to Russian Propaganda

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The Lithuanian Government has welcomed the president's decision to renew the International Commission for Assessing the Crimes of the Nazi and Soviet Occupational Regimes. It also said it hoped that will encourage greater interest in the crimes committed by the occupiers in Lithuania.

Commission member and historian Šarūnas Liekis calls the renewal of the commission a symbolic reply to Russian propaganda attempting to portray Lithuania as an actively fascist state.

"The Government welcomes the president's decision to renew the activity of the international commission," Lithuanian prime ministerial advisor Laimonas Talat-Kelpša said.

He said the goal of the international commission, evidenced in its title, is to assess the scope of Nazi and Soviet crimes in Lithuania.

"The tragic pages of the history of our state are still poorly known. Works by historians commissioned by the commission are published on the internet in Lithuanian and English, so foreign readers can familiarize themselves with them too," the advisor to the prime minister said.

He said the commission is actively involved in educational activity, participates in international cooperation programs, and on the commission's initiative 86 Tolerance Education Centers have been established throughout Lithuania, with more than three thousand teachers attending different seminars in Lithuania and abroad.

"So the commission is needed for Lithuania's future, no less than for studies of

the past,” Talat-Kelpša said.

The commission was first formed in 1998 by presidential decree of Valdas Adamkus. In 2007, however, when the prosecutor general accused commission member and historian Yitzhak Arad of participating in the mass murder of Lithuanian civilians, he withdrew from the commission, whose members stopped meeting. Later the charges against Arad, who categorically denied them, were dropped for lack of evidence.

Talat-Kelpša said “For some time the members of the commission did not meet. But projects connected with tolerance education and education didn’t stop. Let’s hope that the renewed commission, which contains many world-level names, will broaden its work even more and will stimulate even more interest in the international community in the crimes committed by the Nazis and the Soviets in Lithuania.”

The commission includes twenty historians from Russia, Hungary, Lithuania, America, Germany and Israel, including representatives of Yad Vashem and the American Jewish Committee and historians from Yale, Stanford and the Sorbonne.

Šarūnas Liekis, commission member and professor at Vytautas Magnus University, called the resurrection of the commission “a symbolic response to attempts to form an image of all Lithuanian residents as Nazi collaborators, pathological and pugnacious xenophobes, and anti-Semites.”

“The propaganda of the great eastern neighbor through this hyperbolized image of an actively fascist state attempts to question the legitimacy of the Lithuanian state and [Lithuanian] independence, and the choice of a Western orientation [sic],” Liekis said.

He said certain politicians and bureaucrats, [and] several political and public organizations had provided a foundation for this sort of propaganda.

Liekis believes the Arad case has greatly damaged Lithuania’s reputation.

“The commission halted its activities and many things planned were frozen for several years. It’s worth remembering right-wing radicals in Lithuania as well as organizations and people under Russian influence tried to harm the commission,” Liekis, also dean of the Political Science and Diplomacy Faculty at

Vytautas Magnus, claimed.

The plan is for historians to work in two sub-commissions to assess the crimes of the Nazis and Soviets. Furthermore, [Lithuanian] president Dalia Grybauskaitė's presidential decree recognized "the distinct nature of the holocaust [small h], [its] lack of precedent and [its unprecedented] scope."

"The fact the Holocaust is unique sometimes collided with resistance from exalted [sic] special interest and memory communities which have seen themselves as the only victims of totalitarianism in Lithuania. The wish arose for many a dilettante to compare with or even raise above the victims of the Holocaust the suffering of other groups of citizens during the years of the Soviet occupation. Indirectly, attempts to belittle Holocaust victims have been encountered, forgetting that Lithuanian Jews are the same citizens to our state [as] Lithuanians. The dimension [=dichotomy?] of one's own and the other [=us and them] was seriously unbalanced [=placed out of kilter]," Liekis explained.

The President's Office wouldn't comment further on the renewal of the commission. Presidential advisor Daiva Ulbinaitė said "the time to renew the composition came, and it was renewed," and said there would be no further comment on this question.

After the Soviet Union occupied Lithuania in 1940, thousands of people were murdered and more than 17,000 were deported from the country in June of 1941. As soon as the German-Soviet war began the Nazis seized the country, during whose reign more than 90 percent of more than 200,000 Jews were exterminated.

During the period of the Soviet occupation before 1952, 275,000 people were sent to labor camps or deported, 25,000 Lithuanian residents died at the front, and more than 20,000 partisans and their supporters who fought against the Soviet occupation also lost their lives.