

A Month of Baltic Holocaust Distortion in Action

February 16 – Kaunas, Lithuania

February 24 – Tallinn, Estonia

March 11 – Vilnius, Lithuania

March 16 – Riga, Latvia

Efraim Zuroff

Simon Wiesenthal Center

Jerusalem, 2015

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25 Iyar 5775

Dear Friends,

During a period of less than a month, from mid-February to mid-March 2015, I monitored and protested against four neo-Nazi/extreme right-wing marches held in the centers of the major cities of the Baltic countries Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia.

This compilation of op-eds written in the wake of my experiences at those "events" is an attempt to present to the public a description of what transpired and an analysis of the motivation and ideology behind these marches.

It is also an appeal for action to counter the dangerous trends manifested at the marches, given the surprising and worrying lack of response from the United States and Canada, the European Union and even Israel.

Feedback and comments can be sent to swcjerus@netvision.net.il. I also invite you to follow this issue at www.defendinghistory.com, the excellent website of my colleague Professor Dovid Katz, who inspired the protest effort, as well as our own www.operationlastchance.org.

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Text and photographs: Efraim Zuroff

**EFRAIM ZUROFF****PUBLISHED**
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Four Baltic marches, one dangerous racist trend

This coming week will see the opening of what I refer to as "Baltic Neo-Nazi/Ultranationalist March Month." Within exactly 29 days, four such marches will take place in the capital cities of the Baltic European Union members - Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia. And while there obviously are different local nuances, the similarities between the marches are far too numerous to ignore, reflecting a dangerous trend, which deserves to be treated seriously by Brussels.

All the marches are being sponsored by right-wing organizations with fascist sympathies and zero tolerance for local minorities. At past marches in Lithuania, the most popular slogan shouted was "Lietuva lietuvams" (Lithuania for Lithuanians); and in Estonia, it has already been announced that the theme of this year's march will be "Eesti eestlastele" (Estonia for Estonians). In other words, as far as they are concerned, only ethnic Lithuanians or Estonians belong in their country.

The sponsors also share a critical view of the accepted narrative of World War II and the Holocaust, which includes the extensive and zealous collaboration by tens of thousands of Lithuanians, Latvians and Estonians in the mass annihilation of not only their fellow Jewish citizens, but also of thousands of Jews deported from elsewhere in Europe to the Baltic countries to be murdered there, as well as tens of thousands of Jews murdered by security police units from Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia in Belarus. As far as the organizers are concerned, the real "genocide" was that supposedly committed in the Baltics by the Communists, whereas the Holocaust was primarily a respite from the two periods of Soviet repression and persecution in 1940-1941 and 1944-1991.

The revisionist bent of the marchers was boldly evident in both Lithuania and Latvia in previous such events. Thus, for example, the Latvian march is ostensibly to honor the locals who fought alongside the Nazis in the two Latvian SS divisions, whom the marchers seek to portray as Latvian freedom fighters. They conveniently forget three important historical facts: that the goal of these divisions was a victory of the Third Reich, that Nazi Germany had absolutely no intention of granting Latvia independence even if it had won the war, and that among these so-called "Latvian heroes" were quite a few former members of the Latvian Security Police who had actively participated in the mass murder of Jews, local and foreign. In Lithuania, prominently displayed among the nationalist heroes was Juozas Ambrazevicius, the Prime Minister of the Lithuanian Provisional Government established in July 1941, which fully supported the Third Reich and encouraged Lithuanians to participate in the mass murder of their fellow Jewish citizens, hardly a qualification for glorification. At these marches, Lithuanian swastikas, a slightly altered version of the Nazi original to avoid legal problems, were a very common sight.

All four marches are being held in the main avenues of the capital cities, and three of them are celebrations of local independence days. The first march, on February 16 in Kaunas, which was the capital of the first Lithuanian republic in modern times, marks the independence granted in 1918. The second, a week later, on February 23 in Tallinn, marks Estonian independence, and the third, which will be held in the center of Vilnius on March 11, marks the renewal of Lithuanian independence in 1990. (The Latvian march, which will be held in Riga on March 16, is linked to a historic battle of the Latvian Legion.) The combination of exclusionist nationalist slogans with the achievement of freedom for the Baltic peoples is a toxic combination which sends a racist, xenophobic and anti-Semitic message which, at least in theory, runs counter to the values of the European Union.

With the exception of the Estonian march which is relatively new, being held this year for only the second time, I have had the painful experience of personally monitoring each of the three Lithuanian and Latvian marches in recent years. I have also tried, together with Prof. Dovid Katz of Vilnius, the founder and editor of the website www.defendinghistory.com, who has courageously sought to expose and combat Holocaust distortion in Europe and especially in the Baltics, to convince local authorities to either ban the marches or at least to distance them from the city center. Not only have these efforts been unsuccessful, lacking support from any Western country, but the number of participants appears to increase every year.

Obviously, the time has come for Brussels to deal with this potentially very dangerous phenomenon by taking more active measures to combat local xenophobia and anti-Semitism and by working together with the post-Communist "new" democracies of Eastern Europe to curb their enthusiasm to rewrite the history of World War II and the Holocaust. In that respect, perhaps the most effective tool would be to grant Communist victims the recognition and commemoration they deserve, making it abundantly clear that while they were undoubtedly victimized by a criminal regime, their plight was intrinsically different than that of the Jews under the Third Reich.

Efraim Zuroff is the chief Nazi-hunter of the Simon Wiesenthal Center and director of its Israel Office. His most recent book is "Operation Last Chance; One Man's Quest to Bring Nazi Criminals to Justice." His website is: www.operationlastchance.org and he can be followed on Twitter @EZuroff

Kaunas (Kovne), Lithuania

February 16, 2015



The Nazi Hunter: Lithuanian Jew-haters gave me a heart attack - but that won't stop me exposing them

By Dr. Efraim Zuroff

February 18, 2015 18:18 GMT

This week I had the very unpleasant experience of spending a subzero, freezing Monday afternoon together with several hundred mostly young Lithuanian neo-Nazis and ultranationalists in the center of Kaunas, Lithuania's second largest city and its former (interwar) capital.

This was the eighth year in a row that the Lithuanian Union of Nationalist Youth chose to celebrate Lithuanian Independence Day by marching down Laisves Aleja, Kaunas' main avenue, shouting their xenophobic and anti-Semitic slogans and waving all sorts of nationalist symbols, some of which clearly reflect Nazi sympathies with dangerous implications.

For several years, Professor Dovid Katz of Vilnius, a world renowned expert on the Yiddish language and especially its Lithuanian (Litvak) variant, tried to draw attention to this hate fest and get it cancelled but unfortunately, no one seemed to care. Nonetheless, he made it his business to try and show up every year to stage a silent protest and monitor the content of the banners, flags and symbols.

Two years ago, in February 2013, I joined him for the first time, inspired by his courage and determined to help draw attention to what was happening in the largest of the Baltic republics.

To say that the experience was sickening would be a gross understatement, and the fact that I had a mild heart attack less than a week later in retrospect hardly surprised me. The saying about "If looks could kill..." rang especially true that Saturday afternoon, as both Professor Katz and I were well-known for our harsh criticism of Lithuania's failure to confront its bloody Holocaust past.

Add the fact that both of us are well over six feet, and that my colleague bears an uncanny resemblance to Karl Marx, we naturally attracted a lot of venom, and in fact, if not for the very effective protection afforded us by the local uniformed police and plainclothesmen, it could have turned out much worse.

This year, both of us tried separately to convince Mayor Kupcinskis of Kaunas to ban the march or at least move it out of the city centre and prohibit Nazi symbols and

images, but to no avail. So once again, we showed up to monitor and protest, this time with an additional 10 supporters, eight of whom, I am happy to say, are local residents.

As usual, we were the butt of all sorts of nasty comments, dirty looks and obscene gestures. The marchers even sang a special derogatory ditty in honor of Professor Katz, who admitted to me that until the policemen, already familiar to us from past demonstrations, showed up, he had a few nervous moments.

The best way to explain the problems raised by such marches (a much larger one will be held this coming 11 March in Vilnius, also to celebrate Lithuanian Independence Day), is to focus on the two major themes emphasised by the marchers.

Distorted view of history

The first is their lack of tolerance for their country's minorities. Despite the fact that thousands of Russians, Poles, and Jews have lived in Lithuania for generations, as far as the nationalists are concerned it's "*Lietuva lietuvams!*" or Lithuania for Lithuanians, and by that they specifically mean ethnic Lithuanians, not residents or even citizens of Lithuania.

With such an ultranationalist and chauvinistic ideology, it is hardly surprising that the marchers' conception of twentieth century Lithuanian history is rather distorted. Thus one of the largest banners, right at the front of Monday's march, bore the image of Juozas Ambrazevicius, the Prime Minister of the Provisional Lithuanian Government established in early July 1941, shortly after the Nazis occupied Lithuania.

In their eyes, he's a hero who tried to establish a Lithuanian state, but in fact, he was a war criminal, who unequivocally supported the Third Reich and actively assisted the Nazis in their persecution and murder of Lithuania's Jewish population. In this respect, one could claim that it's hard to blame the young marchers for their historical ignorance, since Ambrazevicius' remains were reburied in Kaunas with full honors in spring 2012, but that is precisely the heart of the problem.

Since independence, and especially following their acceptance as full members into the European Union and NATO, Lithuania and her Baltic neighbors have been hard at work trying to rewrite the narrative of World War II and the Holocaust to minimize the extensive crimes of local Nazi collaborators and promote the canard of equivalency between Nazi and Communist crimes.

In doing so, they are undermining the uniqueness of the Holocaust, and undoing decades of important educational work. Thus they hope to rebrand themselves from nations of perpetrators to nations of victims, obviously a far preferable designation.

So, needless to say, the local authorities are hardly perturbed by the slogans, the swastikas, the xenophobia and anti-Semitism on display, because that is precisely what they hope to achieve.

This past Monday's march was only the first of four such marches to be held in the Baltics, two in Lithuania and one each in Estonia and Latvia. My plan is to monitor all four and try to alert the public about this dangerous phenomenon.

Dr. Efraim Zuroff is the chief Nazi-hunter of the Simon Wiesenthal Center and director of its Israel Office. His most recent book is "Operation Last Chance: One Man's Quest to Bring Nazi Criminals to Justice." His websites are www.operationlastchance.org and www.wiesenthal.com He can be reached on Twitter @EZuroff as well as on Facebook.



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THE JERUSALEM POST



Photo by REUTERS

Confronting neo-Nazis in Lithuania

By EFRAIM
ZUROFF
02/18/2015

Several hundred people participated in this march, with nary a word of protest from the official Jewish community or any of the embassies, including Israel.

Ninety-seven years ago, on February 16, 1918, Lithuania regained sovereignty for the first time in hundreds of years and the city of Kaunas (better known in the Jewish world by its Yiddish/Hebrew name Kovno) was named the capital of the newly-established Lithuanian republic. To note that auspicious event, Lithuania continues to celebrate February 16 as Independence Day, despite the fact that it was occupied on June 15, 1940, by the Soviets, subsequently by the Nazis in June 1941, and was not free again until 1991, when the Soviet Union collapsed.

This week, I went to Kaunas to monitor and protest against an event which has become a fixture on February 16 since 2008, an event which in my opinion badly mars what should be the spirit and message of Lithuanian independence. Instead of celebrating Lithuania's freedom from Soviet oppression, the Union of Lithuanian Nationalist Youth annually organizes a march through the center of the city which expresses enmity toward minorities and seeks to rewrite their country's bloody Holocaust history by glorifying those who collaborated with the Nazis and actively participated in the mass murder of their fellow Jewish citizens.

In that respect, there is no small irony in the geographic location of the starting point of this march of lies and hatred.

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The gathering place for the launch is right across the street from the Lietukis garage, the site of a particularly appalling murder of dozens of Jewish men from Kaunas during the initial days of the Nazi occupation in late June 1941, which has become a symbol of the zealous participation of numerous Lithuanians in Holocaust crimes.

On June 25, 1941, three days after the Nazis launched Operation Barbarossa and invaded the Baltics, a gang of Lithuanian vigilantes took about 50 Jewish men to the Lietukis garage. There, on a large open square in the middle of the garage, before a large crowd of men, women and children, they murdered them one by one, by either beating them to death with crowbars or shoving fire hoses down their throats and turning on the water to explode their stomachs. Following this horrific spectacle, which was applauded by the crowd and captured on film by a German army photographer (scenes of which can be seen at Yad Vashem and other Holocaust museums), the crowd stood and sang the Lithuanian national anthem, as if they had just witnessed the most patriotic scene imaginable.

Thus it was particularly upsetting to see a very large banner at the head of this week's parade honoring none other than Juozas Ambrazevicius, the prime minister of the provisional government (LPG) established by the Lithuanians on July 5, 1941. This political body fully

supported the Third Reich, as well as the cruel measures taken against Lithuanian Jews which resulted in the mass murder of thousands during the LPG's one-month existence. I shudder to think how a Jewish survivor living in Kaunas today would react to that image.

As far as the lack of tolerance for minorities, the main slogan shouted ad nauseam by the marchers was "Lietuva lietuvams," and "Lietuvams Lietuva" ("Lithuania for Lithuanians" and "Lithuanians for Lithuania"). In other words, the only worthy and authentic residents of their country, in their opinion, are ethnic Lithuanians, a blatant and obvious insult to the thousands of Poles, Russians and Jews who have called Lithuania home for generations. The irony of such slogans in our context is that the Jewish objects of this exclusionary message are the few individuals who, despite the highly significant role played by ethnic Lithuanians in the Holocaust, have chosen to tie their futures to those of the residents of a country many of whose ethnic Lithuanians thought murdering Jews was the epitome of patriotism.

Several hundred people participated in this march, with nary a word of protest from the official Jewish community or any of the embassies, including Israel. Perhaps it is the inertia engendered by repeated marches, perhaps it is a desire not to rock the boat, or a sense that in a country so busy rewriting the narrative of World War II and the Holocaust to hide the crimes of local collaborators and promote the canard of equivalency between Communist and Nazi crimes, what difference does a march like Monday's really make? I beg to differ, however, since I believe that, despite Lithuania's small size and population, the campaign that it has been pursuing so energetically has already reaped dangerous results, which ultimately threaten not only the country's minorities, but the accepted narrative of World War II and the Holocaust as well. And both these issues represent a real and present danger.

The writer is director of Simon Wiesenthal Center's Jerusalem office.



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Tallinn, Estonia

February 24, 2015



Nazi Hunter: Nuremberg-esque march no way to celebrate Estonian independence

By Dr. Efraim Zuroff

March 3, 2015 12:31 GMT

The torchlight parade held by right-wing ultranationalists last week in the Estonian capital of Tallinn reminded the Russian journalists covering the event of similar spectacles in Nazi Germany, but this was more wishful thinking on their part than actual reality.

They were out in full force this past Tuesday night (February 24), but unfortunately, they were the only foreign television journalists covering the event, with not a single representative of any European Union member country's media in attendance.

That is what is happening these days in Eastern Europe. The slightest hint of neo-fascism, racism, anti-Semitism or xenophobia in a post-Communist country will bring out a horde of Russian journalists eager to provide proof that the former republics of the Soviet Union are already on their way to a Nazi revival, or some equivalent, which would add a lot of grist to Mr. Putin's propaganda machine, and ostensibly justify a unilateral re-annexation of Crimea.

The European Union, on the other hand, does not appear to be particularly perturbed by genuinely disturbing phenomena in the Baltic countries and elsewhere, which, of course, would in no way justify Russian aggression, but deserve to be handled seriously and promptly before they get out of hand.

Tuesday's march, which was sponsored by the Sinine Aratus (Blue Awakening) youth movement, closely affiliated with the Estonian Conservative People's Party (EKRE), was a good example of at least one of the major problems we increasingly encounter in post-Communist Eastern Europe, and especially in the Baltics. I am referring to the rise of ethnocentric sentiment, a euphemism for racism, anti-Semitism, and xenophobia.

Thus the march was publicised under the slogan of 'Estonia for Estonians,' an explicit message of zero tolerance for Estonia's minorities, among them families who have lived in the country for generations. The announcement also bore the symbols of the "sister" parties in Lithuania and in Latvia, whose platforms advocate the same ethnocentricity.

In addition, the only sign I saw besides the one held by the lead marchers which said 'For Estonia,' bore a white supremacy message. In fact, **IBTimes UK** reported not that long ago on a statement by Martin Helme, a leading member of the EKRE, who said that the policy in Estonia towards Africans should be, "If you're black, go back." When questioned about this statement by the Estonian daily *Postimees*, Helme responded that he would not allow political correctness to silence his opinions.

Rewriting Nazi history

The other omnipresent problem in the Baltics was not in evidence this past Tuesday night, but is definitely in the background.

As past marches by Baltic ultranationalists have clearly demonstrated, one of their key goals is to rewrite the narrative of World War II and the Holocaust to hide the extensive lethal complicity of local Nazi collaborators and promote the canard of historical equivalency between Communist and Nazi crimes, often commonly referred to as the "double genocide theory."

A very important element of this campaign is the glorification of certain anti-Communists, despite their participation in the persecution and murder of their fellow Jewish citizens during the Holocaust.

This element was on display last week in Kaunas, Lithuania and will certainly be featured in Vilnius and Riga in the marches scheduled for mid-March. In Estonia, this revisionism is on display at the annual gathering of SS veterans held in Sinimäe every summer, and hosted by the veterans of the 20th Estonian Waffen-SS Grenadier Division, which is attended by SS veterans from many European countries in which such gatherings are illegal.

It is not hard to understand why Estonia, the second smallest of the EU member countries, with a population of only about 1.3 million, a significant percentage of whom are Russian, should seek to safeguard its heritage and culture, but Tuesday's march and the ideology behind it are the worst

way possible to solve these problems.

In Estonia, a country in which local Nazi collaborators participated in the murder of practically every single one of the 1,000 Estonian Jews who lived there under the Nazi occupation, as well as of thousands of foreign Jews deported by the Nazis to Estonia, and local Jews killed by the 36th Estonian Security battalion unit in Nowogrudok, Belarus, they should know better.

Dr. Efraim Zuroff is the chief Nazi-hunter of the Simon Wiesenthal Center and director of its Israel Office. His most recent book is "Operation Last Chance: One Man's Quest to Bring Nazi Criminals to Justice." His websites are www.operationlastchance.org and www.wiesenthal.com He can be reached on Twitter @EZuroff as well as on Facebook.



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THE JERUSALEM POST



Photo by: REUTERS

An alarm bell in Estonia

By EFRAIM
ZUROFF
03/08/2015

I went to Estonia to protest and monitor the march as part of a project to document and assess four neo-Nazi/ultra-nationalist marches which are taking place in a span of less than 30 days.

I very much doubt whether anyone in Israel paid close attention to this past Sunday's national parliamentary elections in Estonia, but I was anxiously awaiting the results to see how the EKRE, the Conservative People's Party, would fare. A week previously, I had personally seen the party in action in Tallinn, Estonia's capital and largest city, where as part of their election campaign, they staged a torchlight parade to celebrate Estonian Independence Day. The march was sponsored under the slogan of "Estonia for Estonians," a very clear and exclusionary message for the country's minorities, many of whom have been residing there for generations.

I went to protest and monitor the march as part of a project to document and assess four neo-Nazi/ ultra-nationalist marches which are taking place in a span of less than 30 days in the capitals of the Baltic countries of Lithuania (two marches, one in the prewar capital of Kaunas [Kovno], and another one in the current capital of Vilnius [Vilna]), Latvia and Estonia. The marches in the first two countries have been staged regularly for quite a few years, but the march in Estonia was being held only for the second time. The number of marchers has been on the rise throughout the region, and the major themes are the lack of tolerance for minorities and the glorification of wartime local Nazi collaborators.

The latter theme is part of a systematic effort by most of post-Communist Eastern Europe, led by the Baltic countries and especially by Lithuania, to rewrite the accepted narrative of World War II and the Holocaust by promoting the canard of equivalency between Communist and Nazi crimes. The motive in this case is to hide, or at least minimize, the significance of the war crimes committed by local Nazi collaborators and emphasize the suffering of these nations under Communist rule.

At the march, the main banner bore the inscription "For Estonia," but the message was clearly directed against the country's minorities, who are perceived as a threat, which is hardly surprising since some of the leaders of the EKRE are known for their lack of tolerance. Thus, for example, prominent party member Martin Helme not that long ago summarized his attitude toward the possibility of African immigrants coming to Estonia as "If you're black, go back."

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As far as historical issues, they were noticeably absent, even though the EKRE reportedly is the party of choice of many Estonian SS veterans. Since the latter meet every summer in Sinimäe, where they host their fellow Waffen-SS veterans from various Western European countries, where such gatherings are prohibited by law, it's possible that the preference was to focus on the more pressing issue of national identity. Another possible explanation might be that the Holocaust does not concern most Estonians, since the scale of the

tragedy was ostensibly very minor, with only 1,000 Jews being caught by the Nazi occupation in July 1941.

The fact of the matter is, however, that almost every single one of those Jews was murdered, in many cases by Estonian Nazi collaborators. In addition, tens of thousands of Jews from other countries were deported to Estonia to be worked to death in some 20 concentration camps staffed by Estonians, and the 36th Estonian Security Police Battalion participated in the mass murder of thousands of Jews in Nowogrudok.

While planning my trip, I consulted with an Israeli friend living in Tallinn for many years, who suggested that I postpone my visit until after the elections on March 1, lest my presence at the march be considered a provocation, which would help the ultra-nationalists at the polls. I explained that obviously I could not accept his suggestion, since it was important to personally attend the march, which was planned to celebrate Estonian Independence Day on February 24. As it turned out, the march took place without any unpleasant incidents, with only about 200 people participating, although the Estonian press did note my presence in negative terms.

The electoral results indicated, however, that there are far too many Estonians willing to support the ultra-nationalist EKRE, which received 46,763 votes, and seven seats (out of 101) in the Riigikogu, the Estonian parliament. They will almost certainly not be part of the new government coalition, but their initial success should ring a loud alarm bell, not only in Tallinn, but also in Brussels.

The author is the chief Nazi-hunter of the Simon Wiesenthal Center and the director of its Israel Office and East European Affairs. His most recent book is Operation Last Chance: One Man's Quest to Bring Nazi Criminals to Justice. His websites are: www.operationlastchance.org and www.wiesenthal.com and he can be followed on Twitter @EZuroff.



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Vilnius (Vilna), Lithuania

March 11, 2015



Riga, Latvia

March 16, 2015





Stepping back in time

By Efraim Zuroff

Created 03/19/2015 - 13:44

Comment

I have once again personally witnessed the ugly manifestations of resurgent neo-fascism in the Baltic countries during the past 10 days.

Last Wednesday some 1,500 Lithuanians participated in a march organised by the Union of Nationalist Youth down the main avenue of Vilnius to mark Independence Day.

On Monday, approximately the same number of Latvians gathered in the centre of Riga to honour Latvian SS veterans who fought for a victory of the Third Reich in the Second World War.

The sights and sounds at each of these events were difficult to stomach, and conjured up other scenes, when the ideological forefathers of the marchers ruled the streets of these two capitals and were active participants in the annihilation of Lithuanian and Latvian Jewry.

These marches highlight the two major themes of current Baltic right-wing discontent. The first is a total lack of tolerance for the local minorities, whether it is Poles, Jews, or Russians. "Lithuania for Lithuanians" was the dominant slogan in Vilnius.

In Riga, the hostility towards Russians and Jews was explicitly expressed in signs, comments, and accusations. Two of the more unpleasant encounters I experienced at the march were with an elderly Latvian who insisted that "all Jews are murderers", and that it was Jews who were responsible for the collapse of the banks.

An elderly woman kept on shouting at me about thousands of murdered Latvian children ostensibly killed by Jewish Communists.

The second theme is related to the ongoing systematic efforts in post-Communist Eastern Europe, but especially in the Baltics, to rewrite the history of the war and the Holocaust in order to minimise or hide the crimes of local Nazi collaborators and promote the canard of equivalency between Nazi and Communist crimes.

In Riga the march seeks to portray the Latvian SS veterans as heroic freedom fighters who paved the way for current independence, a thesis with three basic flaws.

First, the Nazis had absolutely no intention of ever granting independence to any of the Baltic states, regardless of the military contribution of the locals.

So the irony is that today's independent Latvia could never have been established had the Third Reich won the war, a goal which these SS Waffen veterans sought to achieve.

The second point is that fighting for a victory of the most genocidal regime in history is hardly a criteria for the status of heroes under any circumstances.

It is important to note that although the Latvian SS Legion itself was not involved in Holocaust crimes, among these soldiers were quite a few who prior to joining the Waffen-SS had actively participated in the mass murder of Latvian Jewry and thousands of foreign Jews deported to Latvia to be murdered.

In Vilnius, that theme was reflected by a slew of Lithuanian swastikas worn by the marchers and a large, black SS flag prominently flown.

Probably the best way to convey the dangers posed by these events on the one hand, and the utter sense of disgust I felt to watch these spectacles on the main avenues of European Union member states - ostensibly committed to human rights and tolerance - on the other, is to return to my encounter with the Latvian who was convinced that all Jews were murderers.

Totally exasperated by his senseless rantings, I asked him whether, had he been able, he would have joined the infamous Latvian Arajs Kommando, which murdered tens of thousands of Jews in Latvia and later in Belarus. He replied immediately, without batting an eyelash, in the affirmative.

Source URL: <http://www.thejc.com/comment-and-debate/comment/132047/stepping-back-time>

**EFRAIM ZUROFF****PUBLISHED**
March 29th 2015

Feature

One man's journey to the heartland of fascism

Hostility to minorities and attempts to rewrite Holocaust history in Baltics - but no one cares, except Russia

This year marks the 25th anniversary of Baltic independence and more than a decade of full membership in the European Union and NATO. If the assumption was that those developments would cure Lithuanian, Latvian and Estonian society from the scourges of fascism, racism, and anti-Semitism, the events of the past month clearly show that these plagues have not been eradicated. During this period, four separate neo-Nazi/ultra-nationalist marches were held in the Baltics, all of which I attended as a monitor/protester, and I believe that it is important to publicize what I saw and attempt to evaluate the importance and potential dangers posed by those events.

The first question in that regard is the legal status of these marches. Those in Latvia (in Riga on March 16, to honor Latvian SS veterans) and in Lithuania (in Kaunas on February 16 and in Vilnius on March 11, both days on which Lithuanian independence is celebrated) have been a subject of controversy since they were launched, in Latvia in the 1990s and in Lithuania in 2008. Local courts decided to allow the marches on the basis of freedom of speech, and all attempts to have them banned, or at least moved out of the city center, including my appeals this year to the mayors of both Lithuanian cities, have not achieved any practical results.

The second question concerns the sponsors of the events and the number and identity of the marchers. With the exception of Estonia, where the march was organized by the Blue Awakening youth movement, closely linked to the new Conservative People's Party (EKRE), the organizers in Lithuania and Latvia are not officially connected to political parties, but clearly identify with those on the extreme right. In the past, there were government ministers who participated in the SS veterans' march in Latvia, but since the annexation of Crimea, the government has forbidden such participation and last year it cost a minister his post. This year quite a few MP's from the right-wing All for Latvia party marched, and the ministers of justice and of culture, along with Parliament Speaker Ingrida Murnietse, attended a memorial service for the SS.

The number of marchers ranged from 200 in Tallinn to 500 in Kaunas and 1,500 each in Vilnius and Riga. In Estonia, the overwhelming majority of marchers were young - most appeared to be high school students - whereas in Lithuania, most were young adults and in Riga there were also many elderly supporters. One must remember, however, that for every person marching, there are at least several hundred Lithuanians, Latvians, and Estonians who fully agree with the marchers' ideology. Thus, for example, in Estonia's election several days after the march, the EKRE obtained seven parliamentary seats (out of 101), after garnering more than 46,000 votes.

Two dangerous themes were dominant in practically every event. The first was the open hostility toward local minorities - Poles, Russians and Jews in Lithuania, the latter two in Latvia and Estonia. The second was support for ongoing efforts throughout much of post-Communist Eastern Europe to rewrite the narrative of World War II and the Holocaust. These are designed to hide or minimize the extensive crimes by local Nazi collaborators, promote the canard of equivalency between Nazi and Communist crimes (erroneously classified as genocide), and glorify those who fought against the Soviets regardless of whether they had murdered Jews during the Holocaust.



"Section of the march gets underway at Vilnius's Cathedral Square on the March 11th independence day event organized by neo-Nazi and far-right elements with state acquiescence."

Thus, Latvian SS veterans are portrayed as freedom fighters who paved the way for independence, even though the Nazis had absolutely no intention of granting the Baltic countries sovereignty, and marchers in Kaunas carried a huge banner with the image of Juozas Ambrazevicius, the prime minister of a short-lived provisional Lithuanian government, who publicly supported the Third Reich and lethal measures against Lithuanian Jews. In both Lithuanian cities many marchers wore swastikas, and in Vilnius, a large black SS flag was displayed. Only in Estonia was this theme missing, but each summer an international gathering of SS veterans from all over Europe is held, including from countries in which such meetings are legally banned.

The final question relates to the reactions to the demonstrations. Unfortunately, with the exception of Riga where about two dozen protesters symbolically "fumigated" the Freedom Monument after the SS march, there were very few counter-protesters, 12 individuals in Kaunas, no one besides myself in Tallinn, and about 20 in Vilnius, almost all of whom came thanks to the dedicated efforts of Prof. Dovid Katz, the editor of www.defendinghistory.com who is the sole active Jewish voice in the Baltics against Holocaust distortion.

The only good news was that for the first time since Faina Kukliansky assumed the post of Chairperson of the Lithuanian Jewish community, she issued a statement denouncing the march in Vilnius (after initially ignoring the one in Kaunas), and several community officials participated in our protest. There was only silence from the Jewish communities of Latvia and Estonia, as well as from the Israeli embassies in Vilnius, Riga and Helsinki.

Outside of the region, with the exception of Russia, there were no official responses despite numerous international media reports, especially about the Riga march. I can only surmise that perhaps the incessant, and to a large extent justified (albeit often exaggerated) criticism from Moscow of this phenomenon, has silenced those in the West, who long ago should have been the first to object.

Efraim Zuroff is the chief Nazi-hunter of the Simon Wiesenthal Center and director of its Israel Office. His most recent book is "Operation Last Chance; One Man's Quest to Bring Nazi Criminals to Justice." His website is: www.operationlastchance.org and he can be followed on Twitter @EZuroff

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אנטישמיות באירופה: בלי בושה

של שנאת זרים ואנטישמיות עמוקה. מוטיב זה אינו חדש או ייחודי כלל ועיקר, אבל הנושא המרכזי השני והמסוכן מאוד בעיניי הוא התפתחות חדשה, שמתחזקת בצורה מרעידת במד זרח אירופה הפוסט-קומוניסטית ומאיימת לפגוע בצורה קשה ביותר בזיכרון השואה ולבטל הישגים חשובים של עשרות שנים בתחומי החינוך וההגנה צחה. מדובר בתמיכה הנלהבת של הימין הקיצוני במאמצי הממשלות הבלטיות לשכתב את תולדות מלחמת העולם השנייה והשואה. לא מדובר בניסיון להכחיש את העובדה שהשואה אכן התרחשה, אלא במבצע שיטתי למזער או להסתיר עד כמה שאפשר את חלקם החשוב ביותר של משתפי פעולה מקומיים ברצח יהודים בארצות הבלטיות וגם מחוץ לגבולותיהן ולנסות לשכנע את העולם שפשעי הקומוניסטים רעים באותה מידה כמו פשעי הנאצים. כך מקוות ארצות אלה להסיר מעליהן את התווית של מדינות של רוצחים ולהחליפה בסיווג של מדינות של קורבנות, ועל ידי כך לא רק למחוק את פשעיהן הנפשעים אלא גם לזכות אותן ברחמי העולם, ואפילו בתמורה חומרית.

בשל כל זאת הצועדים בריגה מציגים את ותיקי האס.אס.הלטי, שלחמו בשורות הרייך השלישי נגד הסובייטים, כלוחמי חופש שסללו את הדרך לעצמאות ארצם, אף שלנאצים לא היתה כל כוונה להעניק ללטביה עצמאות, וחלקם רצחו יהודים לפני שהצטרפו ליחידות אלה. ולכן בוילנה היו הרבה צלבי קרס ליטאיים ודגלי אס.אס., ובקובנה היה גם שלט גדול מאוד עם תמונתו של ראש הממשלה הזמנית שהקימו הליטאים מיד לאחר הפלישה הנאצית, שתמך ברייך השלישי וברצח יהודי ליטא. בעמדי כמפגין בודד בטאלין (גם בערים האחרות הופיעו מספר קטן מאוד של מפגינים נגד המצעדים האלה), שאלתי את עצמי למה האירועים האלה אינם זוכים לתגובה הולמת מהאיחוד האירופי, מארה"ב ומקנדה, שלא לדבר על ממשלת ישראל ועל הקהילות היהודיות המקומיות. האחרונות מפחדות לעורר אנטישמיות ומרגישות פגיעות במיוחד בגלל מספרן הקטן, אבל מה עם השאר? אולי השבוע של יום השואה הוא עיתוי מתאים במיוחד לדרוש תשובה לשאלה זאת.

הכותב הוא צייד הנאצים הראשי של מרכז שמעון ויזנטל ומנכ"ל המרכז בישראל

לפני חודשיים, כשאזרחי ישראל היו טרום רים במערכת בחירות קשה, צעדו מפגינים לאומנים ואנטישמים כגאון בלב ערי הבירה של הארצות הבלטיות. בתוך פחות מחודש, מאמצע פברואר עד אמצע מארס, התקיימו ארבעה מצעים נירנאציים/אנטישמיים של הימין הקיצוני בליטא (פעמיים), בלטביה ובאסטוניה, בהשתתפות אלפים. נכחתי בכל אחד מהם כמשקיף/מפגין נגד והרגשתי כאילו הוחזרתי במכונת זמן לשנות ה-30 של המאה הקודמת, שבהן הפגנות כאלה באותן ערים היו עניין שכיח. וכמי שבקי בתולדות השואה באותן מדינות, שם שיתוף הפעולה עם הנאצים היה נרחב ונלהב, נחרדתי מהמחזות. היה קשה להאמין שמדינות החברות באיחוד האירופי ובנאט"ו יתירו להפגנות כאלה להתקיים במרכזי ערי הבירה, אך זה בדיוק מה שהתרחש בקאונאס (קובנה), בוילניוס (וילנה), בטאלין ובריגה.

לא מדובר בניסיון להכחיש את העובדה שהשואה אכן התרחשה, אלא במבצע שיטתי לחזער או להסתיר את חלקם של משתפי פעולה מקומיים ברצח יהודים

אפשר ללמוד מה מניע את המפגינים האלה מבדיקת השלטים והסיסמאות שהונפו במהלך המצעדים. מעבר להבדלים מקומיים קלים, אפשר להצביע על שני מוטיבים מרכזיים שמלכים את אש המחאה של הימין הקיצוני בארצות הבלטיות. הראשון הוא השנאה וחוסר הסובלנות כלפי המיעוטים המקומיים. בליטא הכוונה בעיקר לפולנים, לרוסים וליהודים (אף שהקהילה המקומית מונה בקושי כ-5,000 איש), בעוד בלטביה ובאסטוניה העוינות מכוונת בעיקר כלפי ה"מתנחלים" הרוסים, שהתיישבו שם בתקופה הסובייטית בברכת השלטונות, אך גם היהודים נחשבים בעלי זיקה חזקה יותר לרוסיה מאשר לארץ מגוריהם הנוכחית. אין ספק שסיפוח קרים והמעורבות הרוסית במלחמה במזרח אוקראינה העצימו מאוד את החשדנות ואת העוינות בחוגי הימין במדינות הבלטיות כלפי כל מי שחשוד בחוסר נאמנות לשלטון ובאהדה יתרה לממשל פוטיין, אך לכך נוספת מסורת רבת שנים

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Dr. Efraim Zuroff

Unabashed anti-Semitism in the Baltics

Two months ago, as Israelis were deciding for whom to vote during a bitter election campaign, nationalist and anti-Semitic demonstrators marched proudly through the streets in the heart of Baltic capitals. In less than one month, from mid-February to mid-March, four neo-Nazi/anti-Semitic rallies were held: The radical Right in Lithuania held two marches, while Latvia and Estonia hosted one apiece, with thousands of people attending.

I attended them all as an observer/protester and felt as if I had traveled back to the 1930s, when these types of rallies in these very cities were commonplace. And as someone who is well-versed in the history of the Holocaust in these countries, where cooperation with the Nazis was widespread and enthusiastic, I was horrified at the spectacle.

It was hard to believe that European Union and NATO member states could allow rallies such as these on their soil, in their capital cities, but that is exactly what transpired in Kaunas (Kovne) and Vilnius (the second-largest city and the capital of Lithuania respectively); in Tallin (the capital of Estonia) and in Riga (the capital of Latvia).

We can learn what motivates these demonstrators by perusing their signs and listening to the slogans they chant while marching. Beyond slight local variations, it's possible to point at two central motifs that fan the flames of protest for the radical Right in the Baltic. The first is hatred and intolerance of the local minorities.

In Lithuania, the ire is generally aimed at the Poles, Russians and Jews (even though the Jewish community consists of barely 5,000 people). In Latvia and Estonia, hostilities are aimed primarily at the Russian "settlers" who moved there during the Soviet era with the blessing of the Communist regime, but also at the Jews, who are seen as having a greater affinity with Russia than their current home country. Russia's annexation of Crimea and its involvement in the war in eastern Ukraine have undoubtedly exacerbated feelings of distrust and hostility prevalent in right-wing Baltic circles toward anyone suspected of disloyalty to the government and an over-fondness for Vladimir Putin. The centuries-old tradition of xenophobia and deep-rooted anti-Semitism, which are nothing new or unique in any sense of the matter, merely serve as added oil on the fire.

The second motif, however, is a new and disconcerting development which has gained steam in post-Communist Eastern Europe. It threatens to pose a severe detriment to the memory of the Holocaust and negate important achievements that have been made in recent decades in regards to education and commemoration. I am talking about the radical Right's fervent support for efforts by Baltic governments to revise World War II and Holocaust history. These are not attempts to deny the Holocaust took place, rather efforts to systematically minimize or conceal, as much as possible, the important role they played as Nazi collaborators responsible for the murder of Jews inside and outside the Baltic, and to convince the world that the crimes perpetrated by the Communists were no less egregious than the ones committed by the Nazis. By doing so, these countries hope to shed the label of "murderers" and replace it with a label of "victims." Not only do they want their heinous crimes erased, they also want the world's sympathy, even material benefits if possible.

Amid this backdrop, the marchers in Riga present the Latvian SS, which fought with the Third Reich against the Soviets, as freedom fighters who paved the road to their country's independence -- even though the Nazis had no intention of granting Latvia independence and despite the fact that some of them murdered Jews even prior to joining their Nazi units. Therefore, in Vilnius, there were a large number of flags with swastikas and SS emblems, and in Kovne I saw a very large sign with the face of the prime minister temporarily installed in Lithuania immediately following the Nazi invasion, who supported the Third Reich and the murder of Lithuanian Jews.

Standing as a lone counter-demonstrator in Tallin (in the other cities as well only a very small number of people gathered to protest these rallies), I asked myself why these events don't receive an appropriate response from the EU, the U.S. and Canada, not to mention the Israeli government and the local Jewish community. The Jewish communities are afraid of sparking anti-Semitism and feel especially vulnerable due to their small numbers, but what about the rest? Perhaps this week, as we remember the Holocaust, it is the right time to demand answers to these questions.

The writer is the chief Nazi hunter at the Simon Wiesenthal Center and director of the center's Jerusalem Office.

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אפרים זורוף

מאבק באנטישמיות האחרת

במשך חודש התקיימו בערים החשובות ביותר בארצות הבלטיות מצעדים אנטישמיים שבכולם הייתי נוכח כמפגין מנגד. כשמבינים את השנאה שמובילים הצועדים, מבינים גם מדוע הייתי מוכרח לעמוד מולה

בארצם ומחוצה לה לפני שהצטרפו לשורות הוואפן ס"ט, כרוד מדוע חובה להפגין נגד המצעדים הללו.

בנוסף למאבק על הנרטיב ההיסטורי, הצועדים בכל שלוש הארצות הבלטיות באו להביע את שנאתם למיעוטים. בליטא אלה הפולנים, הרוסים והיהודים, ובלטביה ובאסטוניה הכוונה בעיקר לרוסים – אך היהודים בארצות אלה כלולים בהגדרה, כי רובם עברו לשם בתקופת ברית המועצות בברכת השלטון. אין ספק שסיפוח קרים ותמיכת רוסיה בברלנים במזרח אוקראינה רק הוסיפו שמן למדורה והעצימו את ההשדנת כלפי כל מי שאיננו ליטאי, לטבי או אסטוני מקורי, לפי תפיסתם הגזענית של המפגינים.

במרוצת המצעדים, וגם אחריהם ברשתות החברתיות, זכיתי עם המפגינים האחרים בכל מיני עקיצות ו"מחמאות" על החוצפה שלנו ועל כך שניסנו להרוס לצור עדים את שמחת יום העצמאות שלהם. דוד כ"ץ משך במיוחד הרבה זעם, אך כרגיל הצליח להשיב למבקרים בשנינות ובקור רוח. בהקשר זה ראוי להוסיף שבניגוד לצפיות, אף מדינה חוץ מרוסיה לא מחתה נגד המצעדים והמסרים הבעייתיים במיוחד שלהם – לא מדינות האיחוד האירופי, שהבלטיות חברות בו יותר מעשור, לא ארה"ב וקנדה, ואפילו לא ישראל. רק בליטא הביעה הקהילה היהודית מורת רוח, אולי בהשראת שגרירות ישראל החדשה שנפתחה רשמית בוילנה למחרת המצעד. הקהילות בלטביה ובאסטוניה לא פצו פה.

אולי הדרך הטובה ביותר להסביר את חשיבות המחאה היא בתיאור שני מפגשים שקיימתי עם תושבים בריגה ובוילנה. לאחר סיום המצעד בלטביה עמדתי יחד עם פרוץ כ"ץ, ולקראתנו צעד לטבי גבוה, לבושי יפה ובערך בגיל שבעים, ופתח במונולוג מזעזע בלטבית, מלא בהאשמות נגד היהודים, שלדבריו כולם רוצחים שמוטט את הבנקים בלטביה. בתגובה ביקשתי מהצד תונאי הלטבי-אמריקני שתרגם לנו את הדברים לשאל את המאשים אם אינו מצטער שמפאת גילו הצעיר הוא לא היה יכול להצטרף אישית במלחמת העולם השנייה לקומנדו אריים – יחידת רצח לטבית שהרגה עשרות אלפי יהודים בלטביה ובבלרוס. הוא ענה בחיוב. מנגד, בבית הכנסת בוילנה נפחד ממני אחד מתפללי מבוגר ולחש לי באוזן: "תודה רבה על כל מה שאתה עושה בשבילנו".

ד"ר אפרים זורוף הוא צייד הנאצים הראשי של מרכז שמעון ויזנטל, ומנהל את משרד המרכז בישראל



צילום: אפרים זורוף

התופעה היא מקור לדאגה רצינית. דגל ס"ט שחור מונף מול הפרלמנט הליטאי



ראוי להוסיף שבניגוד לצפיות, אף מדינה חוץ מרוסיה לא מחתה נגד המצעדים והמסרים הבעייתיים שלהם – לא האיחוד האירופי, שהמדינות הבלטיות חברות בו יותר מעשור, לא ארה"ב וקנדה, ואפילו לא ישראל

וברצח היהודים בליטא.

בלטביה הסיפור שונה, אך המגמה דומה: המצעד בריגה נועד לכבד את זכרם ולפאר את פועלם של הלטבים ששירתו בשורות שתי החטיבות הלטביות של הוואפן ס"ט, ולהציג אותם כ"לוחמי חופש" שסללו את הדרך לרע צמאותה של ארצם. התיאור הזה שקרי לחלוטין, כי לא הייתה לגרמנים שום כוונה להעניק עצמאות ללטביה. אם נוסיף לכך את העובדות שהלטבים נלחמו למען הניצחון של הנאצים, ושביניהם היו גם אנשי משטרת הביטחון הליטאית שהשתתפו ברצח עשרות אלפי יהודים

אותו, וכן לשכנע את העולם שפשעי הקומוניזם סטים איומים באותה מידה כמו פשעי הנאצים. הטענה האחרונה חשובה במיוחד, כי אם אכן כך היה, אזי יהיה אפשר להגדיר את פשעי ברית המועצות כ"רצח עם", להצביע על מוצאם היהודי של רבים מהפושעים הללו וכך להשתק את הטענות של היהודים ברבר השתתפותם הפעילה של ליטאים, לטבים, ואסטונים רבים ברצח יהודים בשואה. כמו כן, טענה זו תאפשר למצדיקה לפאר כמה מגיבוריהם, שנלחמו נגד הקומוניסטים אך גם רצחו יהודים בשואה. אם תתקבל התיאוריה השקרתית של שני מקרי רצח עם שווים, הרבר יערער את ייחודה של השואה ותהיה לכך השפעה הרסנית על היינון וההנצחה בסוגיה זו.

הנושא בא לידי ביטוי בשלושת המצעדים בליטא ובלטביה בשתי דרכים שונות. הראשון הוא שפע הסמלים הנאציים בליטא: רבים מבין הצועדים בוילנה ובקובנה ענרו צלבי קרס ליטאיים מיוחדים, שהם צלבי קרס עם תוספת פסים מזערית, המאפשרת להם לטעון שלא מדובר בסמל נאצי. בוילנה הונף דגל ס"ט שחור, שגישא בגאון ולא עודד שום תרומת בקרב הצועדים. בקובנה הופיעה באחד השלטים הגדולים ביותר דמותו של יואכים אמברוזיץ-זיס, שכיהן כראש הממשלה הזמנית שהקימו הליטאים בראשית יולי 1941, ושת"מ כהן להחבת בארולף היטלר, ברייך השלישי

אנחנו עוסקים יותר ויותר באנטישמיות באירופה בשנים האחרונות, בעיקר במערב היבשת ובמיוחד בעקבות פיגועים רצחניים דוגמת אלה שבטולח, בבריסל, בפריז ובקופנהגן. באופן טבעי, השיח מתמקד באנטישמיות "החדשה", אשר קשורה לכאורה לסכסוך במזרח התיכון ובדרך כלל הפיגועים שקשורים אליה מכופעים על ידי מהגרים מוסלמים במדינות מערב אירופה.

אבל יש גם אנטישמיות אחרת שפורחת בימים אלה במזרח אירופה, וזו תופעה שאינה כרוכה בעוינות כלפי מדינת ישראל. במקרים מסוימים יש במדינות מזרח היבשת אהדה רבה כלפי ישראל, אבל האנטישמיות בהן מסוכנת ומהווה מקור לדאגה רצינית.

לא מזמן, התעמתי מול האנטישמיות הזו ארבע פעמים בתוך קצת פחות מחודש: מאמצע פברואר עד מאמצע מרץ התקיימו בערים החשובות ביותר בארצות הבלטיות – ליטא, לטביה ואסטוניה – ארבעה מצעדים של נאירנאצים, לאומנים או אנשי ימין קיצוני, שבכולם הייתי נוכח כמפגין וכמפגין מנגד. המצעדים הללו החלו לפני כמה שנים, ועד כה עלו בתוהו כל הניסיונות שלנו ושל אחרים למנוע אותם בגלל המסרים הגזעניים והאנטישמיים שבהם. לא קל לעמוד בורד (במקרה אחד באסטוניה), רק עם קומץ יהודים ופילוסופים (בליטא, בוילנה ובקובנה) או אפילו עם קצת יותר מפגינים אנטי-פשיסטים (ברייגה בירת לטביה), אבל היעדר כל נוכחות יהודית ואנטי-לאומנית היה מפקיר את הזירה לדעות מסוכנות.

ההחלטה להפגין נגד כל ההפגנות, אפוא, נבעה מהרגשת מחויבות לקהילות היהודיות הקטנות בארצות אלה, ומהאומץ יוצא הדופן של ידידי, פרופסור דוד כ"ץ, מומחה עולמי לידידות וזה יותר מעשור תושב וילנה, שכבר כמה שנים מפגין כמעט לבר נגד המצעדים בקובנה ובוילנה. עוד סיבה למחאה הייתה עליית מספרי המשתתפים במחאות, שהגיעו השנה בוילנה וברייגה ל-1,500, בקובנה צעדו כאלף איש ובטאלין מאתיים.

צריך לציין שכל המצעדים הללו אינם נערכים ביחזמת ממשלות אלא בארגון של תנועות ימין קיצוניות. אולם לפחות אחד משני המסרים המרכזיים בשלושה מארבעת המצעדים היה קריאה לחוק מגמה משותפת שלוש הממשלות הבלטיות, הפוגעת קשות בויכרון השואה ובנרטיב המקובל במערב לגבי ההיסטוריה של מלחמת העולם השנייה והפיתרון הסופי: זהו הניסיון לשכתב את תולדות מלחמת העולם השנייה והשואה כדי להסתיר את חלקם החשוב ביותר של משתפי הפעור לה מקומיים ברצח יהודים או לפחות למזער