

‘Right of Reply’...

Condemnation of Communism Does Not Require Submission to Double Genocide, Holocaust Obfuscation, or the Recent Deterioration in Civil Society and Free Speech in Lithuania

by [Dovid Katz](#)

Rokas Grajauskas cites me in his [recent article](#) on these pages as invoking the notion Holocaust Obfuscation (a term I [proposed formally in 2009](#)) to refer to “the efforts of the post-Communist countries to revive the memory of Stalin’s crimes”. Nothing could be further from the truth. My own website, [DefendingHistory.com](#), although dedicated primarily to the battle against trivialization of the Holocaust and the concomitant racism and antisemitism of the new Far Right in Eastern Europe, contains a [page on Soviet crimes](#), where I wholeheartedly embrace such Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly resolutions as [1096](#) (1996) and [1481](#) (2006), which wisely and rightly condemn Soviet crimes. It is vital that the full extent of these crimes be documented, the victims honored, the subject properly taught in international curricula, museums and memorializing institutions established, and justice pursued to the full extent of law. It is every bit as vital that Western commitment to Baltic security and independence remain unwavering, what with a huge unpredictable neighbor “with a certain past” (and unclear future) situated to the immediate east.

It is only after such attempts were demonstrably usurped by the far-right Double Genocide movement, insisting that all of Europe must accept the abject nonsense that Nazi and Soviet crimes were “equal” that one began to hear the voices of protest from [the tiny and vanishing Jewish communities](#) in Eastern Europe, as well as from [a wide array of voices in the democratic West](#), including, in late 2010, [seven European ambassadors](#) stationed in Vilnius — from Britain, Estonia, Finland, France, Netherlands, Norway and Sweden — whose letter to the president of Lithuania included the now classic line: “Spurious attempts are made to equate the uniquely evil genocide of the Jews with Soviet crimes against Lithuania, which, though great in magnitude, cannot be regarded as equivalent in either their intention or result.” So let us now discard the newest stereotype in town, that those who disagree with Double Genocide are necessarily supporters (or sycophants) of Moscow, or Jewish — a strange juxtaposition one does not expect to find uncritically recycled in highbrow academic parlance here on the pages of *Lithuanian Foreign Policy Review*. One of the European human rights champions who has spoken up with the most candor is British MP Denis MacShane, not least in his *Globalizing Hatred* (London 2008), where he lamented “the antisemitism coming back to life in some quarters of nationalist politics in the Baltic state [...]” (p. 33). Another is British MP John Mann who was the first

in Europe to document the antisemitic undertones of the red-equals-brown campaign. In response to a January 2008 conference in Tallinn, [he rose in the Commons to expose](#) what was underway.

In fact, current efforts to depict the Second Opinion on this issue as of necessity derivative from pro-Soviet (or Putinist) sentiments, or being only that of “Jews” is symptomatic of a (hopefully temporarily) declining environment of intellectual discourse and freedom in Lithuania, where parliament passed and the president signed, in June 2010, [a discreditable “red-brown law”](#) that threatens in some circumstances up to two years of prison for those who would deny or downplay either “genocide”, which is to say, in effect those who would deny Double Genocide. Even if nobody is ever imprisoned under the law, its effect has been, in the short time since passage, to stifle free debate and to encourage ever more liberal young Lithuanian intellectuals to emigrate. Its enactment, incidentally, followed upon that of a similar law in Hungary, passed shortly after the rise of the current right-wing government there, which has attempted to stifle the free media more widely.

The Double Genocide movement, which actually started in the Holocaust era itself in a blame-the-victims mentality (“the Jews were all communist criminals and got what they deserved”), has of late been intellectualized and disseminated by a variety of state-sponsored Orwellian institutions suffused with ultranationalism, antisemitism, and a desire to glorify Nazi collaborators of 1941. Mr Grajauskas himself notices something amiss with the “Museum of Genocide Victims” in central Vilnius. The museum ignores the one genocide that actually occurred in the country. Even worse, it [venerates the killers of 1941 as heroic rebels and features antisemitic exhibits](#) without curatorial comment. Similar attitudes are also evident at the [Genocide and Resistance Research Center](#), which is also responsible for the antisemitic “historic descriptions” at [Gruto parkas](#) near Druskininkai. When it comes to trying to “equalize” evils numerically, it is strange to see a paper in an academic journal quoting the figures of Soviet deportees beamed out by nationalist politicians in place of reliance upon the scholarly literature.

The “[Prague Declaration](#)” of June 2008 does not seek merely to win recognition for the truly appalling nature of many Soviet crimes. Among its extremist demands is that all Europe accept the idea that “Europe will not be united unless it is able to [...] recognize Communism and Nazism as a common legacy,” as if unity and friendship between peoples depend on mind-control-grade agreement, rather than the harmonious symphony of diverse and competing views in democratic societies. The Declaration insists that “crimes against humanity committed by the Communist regimes [...] must inform all European minds to the same extent as the Nazi regime’s crimes”; that Communist crimes must be assessed “in the same way Nazi crimes were assessed by the Nuremberg Tribunal”; demands establishment of a Europe-wide mixed red-brown remembrance day on 23 August, and, perhaps most sensationally, the “overhaul of European history textbooks so that children could learn

and be warned about Communism and its crimes in the same way as they have been taught to assess the Nazi crimes”. (A first draft of a proposed antidote to the Prague Declaration is posted [here](#)).

Returning to Lithuania, the campaign for the Prague Declaration [and related legislation and declarations](#) has not been pursued in a historical, political or social vacuum. It coincides with a period when the state [has sanctioned neo-Nazi marches on the capital's main boulevard](#) on independence day, failed to counter [1930s style antisemitic headlines](#) (even while [pouring money into PR “Jewish culture activities”](#)), and worst of all, when prosecutors have been pursuing not the Nazi war criminals they never showed serious interest in, but Holocaust Survivors who are alive because they escaped the ghetto to join the anti-Nazi partisans in the forests. A group of US congressmen still wait for a meaningful reply to their [December 2009 letter on this subject](#). And in Vilnius, back in 2008, the [Irish](#), [American](#) and [British](#) embassies publicly honored the anti-Nazi heroes who were being “investigated”, the first occasion since Soviet times, alas, when Western embassies were honoring persons being trashed by the state and prosecutors in this part of the world.

But these aged Holocaust Survivors were also honored for that very anti-Nazi resistance by the late President (later Prime Minister) [Algirdas Brazauskas](#), and the [free world at large](#). There is not one iota of evidence against any of them in connection with any alleged misdeed. [The frightful campaign of defamation](#) has included the canard that they cannot be found (leading to endless internet references to “the Jews hiding their war criminals”), and their “guilt” was most recently internationally trumpeted, quite unbelievably, by [the Lithuanian Human Rights \[!\] Association](#). In late January 2011 [the one-thousand day mark](#) was reached in the international vigil maintained internationally since the day police came looking for two elderly Jewish women in Vilnius; one of them, Dr Rachel Margolis, now 89, is afraid to return to Lithuania to see her native Vilnius one last time. Why did Lithuania inflict all this upon itself? That is the work wrought by the psychological, political, careerist and nationalist bandwagon increasingly known as: Double Genocide.

In 2010, a Klaipeda court [declared public swastika displays to be legal](#). Instead of condemning all (or indeed any) of [a frightening series of antisemitic, racist and homophobic developments](#), the foreign minister added to the lamentable atmosphere with his own [denunciations of imagined Jewish plots](#) on the topic of dual citizenship. The country's tiny but courageous Jewish community [responded rapidly](#).

The interrelationship between failure to deal straightforwardly with the Holocaust and contemporary antisemitism has been analyzed by a number of fine scholars, including [Efraim Zuroff \(2005\)](#), [Leonidas Donskis \(2006\)](#) and [Clemens Heni \(2009\)](#).

Lithuania's current foreign policy, entailing an expensive, self-destructive and misguided campaign to “rewrite history”, is doing grave damage both to the country's international standing and to [its own democratic potential](#). The fine, hard-working, long-suffering and forward-looking Lithuanian people

frankly deserve better leadership and a much more robust and fearless democratic spirit that would encourage diversity of opinion and open debate, even on the most painful episodes of the past. There is no country on this earth that does not have dark spots on its history.

And last but not least, to turn to the core issue:

I invite Mr. Grajauskas to join me in an expedition from (for example) the Belarusian border to the Baltic Sea, with detours north and south to visit as many towns and villages as possible. I predict we will find wherever we go Lithuanian (and Polish and Belarusian and Russian and other) people of all ages and sizes. But in town after town, all that is left of the erstwhile Jewish population is one of [the 250 or so mass graves that dot the country](#). Some 95% of Lithuanian Jewry, [over 200,000 citizens, were murdered](#) — men, women, children, only because they were Jews — in consequence of the massive and enthusiastic local participation, that started even before the establishment of German Nazi control (this “Baltic Proportion”, similar in all three states, was the highest in Europe). [Bold Lithuanian truth-tellers have spoken out fearlessly](#) over the years, and it is sad that so many of them have been marginalized in the face of the establishment’s Double Genocide campaign. At the same time, [the inspirational bravery of the many hundreds of Lithuanians](#) who risked everything to save a neighbor must never be forgotten.

Nothing could be worse for the Baltic states, their noble peoples, or the true need for education about Communist crimes internationally, than the present campaign, led by elites (politicians, academics, journalists etc.), to obfuscate the Holocaust via a bogus model of equality between Nazi and Soviet crimes that is empirically interlaced with numerous unsavory features that are being increasingly (if still informally) discussed in Western diplomatic and political circles as the East European New Far Right’s ability (so far) to project itself as center-right or center.

The very notion that the forces that liberated Auschwitz are ipso facto “equal” to those who perpetrated its genocide is so counterfactual that it behooves investigation of how the Double Genocide campaign could have come as far as it did. The answer to that may lie in the ability of even small states to (temporarily) obfuscate issues of history with expensive nationalistically motivated campaigns when others are busy with other matters and not paying much attention, and often unaware of the locally motivating factors.

To try to enshrine such “equivalence” in European Parliament legislation, or even worse, in laws that criminalize free debate, should be opposed by every genuine friend of Lithuania and the Baltic states.

The ultranationalist, racist, and antisemitic undertones of the current Double Genocide campaign are doing grave damage to Lithuania, and the sooner more local voices are raised in opposition, the better for the country on numerous counts, including political maturity; growth in democracy and open

society and tolerance; maintenance of high academic standards in the humanities and history (where diversity of opinion and approach is a prized asset); capacity for retaining talent in the country and attracting more of it from the far corners of the earth; and last but not least, genuine love for the scant remnants of peoples whose historic participation in seven hundred years of shared history is a proud legacy of the Grand Duchy, a legacy that continues to be cherished far and wide.

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