Juozas Gabrys, *Auf Wache für die Nation. Erinnerungen der Weltkriegsagent Juozas Gabrys berichtet (1911–1918)*, (E. Demm, Ch. Nikolajew [Hrsg.]), (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang), 2013. 400 p. ISBN 978-3631-644-51-5

Auf Wache für die Nation (Tautos sargyboje) is the second memoir by the early 20th-century Lithuanian political emigrant and national activist Juozas Gabrys-Paršaitis (1880–1951).¹ He was arguably one of the most prominent Lithuanian politicians to become directly involved in European politics before 1918. Chronologically, the memoirs begin in 1911, with the establishment of the Lithuanian Information Bureau, an organisation designed to propagate Lithuanian claims on the international stage. Yet Gabrys' fame grew in connection with another organisation, the Paris-based Union des Nationalités (sometimes referred to as the Office central des Nationalités, or the Office central de l'Union des Nationalités). Like the LIB, the main task of the Union was to raise nationalities issues.² The organisation brought together members of various non-dominant nations, promoted their culture, history and political claims, discussed national and cultural autonomies, taught national activists how to cooperate, helped in carrying out international propaganda campaigns, and so on. Gabrys' activities peaked during the First World War, when, as he claimed, for the benefit of the future of Lithuania, he attempted to collaborate with both warring sides, the Entente and the Germans. Soon, however, this strategy discredited him in the eyes of the Lithuanians. Just before the end of the war, Gabrys lost his position as the Lithuanian representative in the West, and basically became a political pariah. Therefore, one of the main goals

¹ In 1920, Gabrys published his first memoirs: *Vers l'Indépendance lithuanienne. Faits, impressions, souvenirs, 1907–1920* (Lausanne, 1920). The text was shorter, and, in comparison to the late 1930s edition, very scant in facts, especially in relation to his dealings with the Germans. A much stronger emphasis was placed on his pro-Entente activities. Perhaps due to the overall political situation in Europe in the late 1930s, the second set of memoirs carried somewhat clearer 'pro-German' undertones.

² The organisation's aim was to assist the 'isolated nationalities, which left to themselves can do nothing to regain their liberty or safeguard their autonomy and independence, we urged their grouping, leaguings and uniting for getting to know one another, and creating amongst them a sort of moral federation as a prelude to and condition of a closer union' ('The First Universal Congress of Nationalities', *The Peace Movement*, 8 (1912), p. 119).

of the memoir was to explain his actions during the war, perhaps with the hope of rehabilitation.

Auf Wache für die Nation is the second publication of memoirs. It was first published in the original Lithuanian in 2006.³ Unfortunately, this edition suffers from several rather significant flaws: parts of the text are missing, the editors have provided only basic biographical details, with almost no commentaries on the events, and incongruities left by the author. In parallel to that, publishing the text only in Lithuanian made it available to a narrow readership, even though the memoirs contain information that could be interesting to German, French, Swiss and other historians. To some extent, this can be explained by the fact that Gabrys' personality and activities are still largely under-researched, even in Lithuanian historiography. Very few scholars have touched upon the topic, chief among who are: Alfred Erich Senn,⁴ Alfonsas Eidintas⁵ and Eberhard Demm.⁶ It was Demm who took the initiative to improve the Lithuanian edition, and together with Christina Nikolajew meticulously prepared the text in its German translation. Moreover, as one of the few specialists on the topic, Demm supplied a comprehensive introduction, and, what is more important, provided commentaries to the text. This not only allows us to grasp the complicated historical background, but also discloses Gabrys' numerous attempts to conceal or distort certain facts and events in order to improve his own image. Hence, this makes *Auf Wache für die Nation* an entertaining, interesting, and at the same time rather peculiar, text.

Arguably, Gabrys' style of writing allows us to read the book in at least three different ways: 1) for historians, as a historical source; 2) for biographers, as a (psychological) self-portrait of the Lithuanian political activist; and 3) to some degree as historical fiction. First and foremost, the memoirs serve as a source for early 20th-century Lithuanian and European history. Despite the fact that the main target readership was meant to be the Lithuanians (as mentioned, Gabrys' main intention was to rehabilitate himself in the eyes of the Lithuanian public), there is plenty of informa-

³ Juozas Gabrys-Paršaitis, *Tautos sargyboj*, ed. L. Saldukas (Vilnius, 2006).

⁴ A. E. Senn, 'Garliawa: A Study in Émigré Intrigue, 1915–1917', *The Slavonic and East European Review*, 45(105) (1967), pp. 411–424; also, 'The activity of Juozas Gabrys for Lithuania's Independence, 1914–1920', *Lituanus. Lithuanian Quarterly Journal of Arts and Sciences*, 23, no. 1 (1977), <http://www.lituanus.org/1977/77_1_02.htm> (accessed 18.08.2014).

⁵ A. E., *Slaptasis Lietuvių diplomatas: istorinis detektyvas* (Vilnius, 1992).

⁶ E. Demm, 'Friedrich von der Ropp und die litauische Frage (1916–1919)', *Zeitschrift für Ostforschung*, 33 (1984), pp. 16–56; 'Ein freies Litauen in einem befreiten Europa' – *der politische Kampf des Juozas Gabrys*, Lampertheim, 1986); *Nationalistische Propaganda und Protodiplomatie als ethnisches Geschäft: Juozas Gabrys, die 'Union des Nationalités' und die Befreiung Litauens (1911–1919)* (Lampertheim, 2001).

tion on international politics too. As the secretary-general of the Union des Nationalités, he became acquainted with and interacted with a number of representatives from different national movements (Catalans, Czechs, Basques, Latvians, Poles, Ukrainians, and others), organised international conferences, discussed topical nationalities issues, and so on. While in Paris, he worked together with several prominent academic and political figures of the time, like the historian Charles Seignobos (1854–1952), the politician Paul Painlevé (1863–1933), and the lawyer and peace activist Paul Otlet (1868–1944), to name just a few.

The pre-First World War period is covered mostly in the first part of the book. Most of the book, however, is devoted to events during the war. They primarily reveal Gabrys' activities in Switzerland, where the main focus shifted from international cooperation to issues related to Lithuania and Lithuanians, like, for example, the organisation of war relief, support for Lithuanian POWs, probing grounds for the country's independence, and others. In Switzerland, Gabrys managed the Union and several Lithuanian organisations almost single-handedly, while at the same time secretly collaborating with the German Auswärtiges Amt. Even though it is quite hard to grasp the scale and complexity of his involvement in the 'nationalities game', nevertheless the sheer amount of events mentioned, people, plots and schemes is striking. However, the text is even more complicated than that. As Demm has rightfully observed, Gabrys' earlier memoirs published in 1920 in French, have almost no mention of his cooperation with the Germans, while writing in the late 1930s he included the topic because it probably appeared as a less sensitive issue at the time. Regardless of the apparent sincerity, Gabrys nevertheless employed the distortion of facts and self-censorship. Demm's comments allow readers to stay on track, but knowing the intentions and skills of the author, we should take the memoirs with an extra pinch of salt.

The book is also an excellent source for painting a psychological picture of the Lithuanian politician. While reading the memoirs, we can observe Gabrys' ego-centrism and dictatorial inclinations. The transformation becomes especially clear when comparing *Auf Wache für die Nation*, one of the last of his writings, with Gabrys' earlier writings. Influenced by active participation in the Revolution of 1905, followed by the lonely life of a political emigrant, his rise as chief Lithuanian propagandist in Europe, his high position in the Union des Nationalités, the hard personal and political choices during the war, postwar resignation, disillusion, and so on, all this must have modelled the colourful character that Gabrys was.

Finally, we could attempt to read the book as a historical novel: 'The Adventures of Juozas Gabrys, the industrious Lithuanian patriot on the international scene of diplomatic intrigue'. Whether intentionally or not, the author adopted a rather playful writing style (it is especially noticeable in the Lithuanian). The memoirs read as a single narrative, where from

beginning to end the protagonist pursues one storyline, making Lithuania an independent country.⁷ All the events are adapted to the main line, facts are selected, dialogues invented, and so on. Gabrys presents himself as a political visionary, a cunning strategist and an outstanding patriot. In his opinion, not even the most prominent French, German, Russian and other politicians and army officers could resist Gabrys' arguments, reasoning and suggestions; like, for example, claiming that because of him the German military administration enlarged the OberOst into a territory that covered almost all of the Lithuanian-inhabited space.

Gabrys admitted indirectly that he was not a team-player. Starting from the end of 1917, he was gradually pushed away from Lithuanian matters, and soon became a nuisance to the Lithuanian political elite. In the last chapters, we can clearly notice the author's bitterness when he tries to explain his actions and clear the accusations. He blamed President Antanas Smetona and his political ambitions for all the Lithuanian failures during the interwar period, although Gabrys' personal and political ambitions are quite well revealed in the memoirs too.

The editors took good care in preparing the volume for a wider international readership. Apart from several small misprints and somewhat questionable references to Wikipedia, Gabrys' memoir *Auf Wache für die Nation* is an excellent addition to the early 20th-century Central and East European historical narrative.

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⁷ Demm points out Gabrys' 'corrections' in a number of presented documents, where the word 'autonomy' (which was the Lithuanian goal before 1916) was replaced with 'independence' p. 75.