Nakanune Kholokosta. Front litovskikh aktivistov i sovetskie repressii v Litve. 1940–1941 gg. Sbornik dokumentov, ed. A. Diukov, Moscow: Fond Istoricheskaya Pamiat', 2012. 535 p. ISBN 978-5999-000-18-7

This recent Russian collection of documents addresses a brief but critical period in Lithuania's history which continues to evoke acrimonious debates. The 12 months of the first Soviet occupation of the country came to an end in a spate of violent convulsions in June 1941: Stalin's deportation of nearly 20,000 men, women and children (14–17 June), the German attack on the USSR which followed only days later (22 June), and the outbreak of an anti-Soviet uprising resulting in the proclamation of a short-lived Provisional Government (PG). As they retreated, the Red Army, the Soviet police and communist activists massacred nearly a thousand prisoners and other civilians. The arrival of the Nazis commenced an even deadlier wave of murder. Hundreds of alleged and real communist collaborators were killed, but the most brutal excesses and massacres were directed against the Jews, thousands of whom were shot during the first week of July at the Seventh Fort outside Kaunas. The killings abated in mid-July, but the slowdown was only temporary. In early August 1941, some 95% of Lithuania's Jews were still alive, albeit under a regime of persecution. Then, in less than three months, more than two-thirds were dead, a wave of slaughter that culminated in the shooting of some 10,000 Jews in Kaunas on 28 October. Most of the remainder were driven into ghettos for slave labour and eventual annihilation; a much smaller number escaped death, sheltered by Gentile neighbours. The first stage in the extermination of nearly six million European Jews began as the bloodiest event in Lithuania's modern history.

As the title of this collection indicates, its compiler, Aleksandr Diukov, purports to shed light on the situation in Lithuania 'on the eve of the Holocaust'. The book's documents and editorial commentary accentuate the link between the Lithuanian Activist Front (LAF), the anti-Soviet alliance established in Berlin in November 1940, and the repression which characterised the first Soviet occupation of Lithuania (1940–1941).

Diukov contends that the events which preceded the genocide of the Jews reveal a clear case of cause and effect. He poses and answers questions. 'Were the deportations in reality the response of the Soviet authorities to the destructive activities of the pro-Nazi Lithuanian nationalist underground?' (Yes.) Were the deportations 'planned ... earlier and

would they have been carried out regardless of the underground activities of the LAF?' (No.) Was the 'June uprising' a reaction to the mass arrests or was 'the rebellion prepared long before ... without any connection to the deportations'? (No – to the first, yes – to the second.) On perhaps the most controversial issue, the compiler waxes rhetorical: 'And what was the mass murder of the Jews by Lithuanian 'nationalist partisans' in the summer of 1941: a cruel reaction to a cruel deportation, or a timely opportunity for a premeditated crime, not directly connected to the deportations?' He promotes the latter theory. Historians who obsess about causal relationships should be warned. Some uncomfortable questions inevitably arise: for example, one might ask whether the LAF would ever have come into existence without the Soviet occupation.

Diukov acknowledges that he is entering a controversy: 'It is not surprising that the answers [to these questions] depend on the political convictions of those taking part in the discussions and often carry a speculative character.' He asserts that much of Lithuanian historiography on the first year of the Soviet occupation is 'very stereotypical, one-sided and not free of factual errors.' In Diukov's view, the sins of this historiography include the following: a tendency to mischaracterise Soviet repression as 'genocide'; the whitewashing of the LAF's fundamentally fascist character; the erroneous portrayal of Soviet repression as a 'preprogrammed and inevitable consequence of Lithuania's annexation by the Soviet Union', which leads, in turn, to the failure to ascertain the real motives of the Soviet agents of repression who faced a 'real enemy, the underground of the Lithuanian Activist Front, which cooperated with the Nazi special services'.

To bolster the notion that compiling lists of anti-Soviet elements by the Soviet security services (the NKVD and NKGB) constituted a not unusual response to an internal threat, Diukov compares the Kremlin's repressive policies to the American crackdown during the infamous 'Red Scare' of 1919 and the FBI's creation of a database of domestic dissenters during the 1960s.¹ 'Similar informational work,' he asserts, 'was characteristic of all police organs of the 20th century, regardless of the nature of the ruling regimes in question.' The documents in the collection are intended to show that the major reason for the deportation of thousands of men, women and children, was the inescapable need 'to combat the pro-German nationalist underground which had united under the Lithuanian Activist Front.' (For the above quotes, see pp. 7–13.)

The compilers assert that 'the majority of the documents included in this collection are published for the first time' (p. 26), but elsewhere this is claimed only for the NKVD-NKGB records (p. 11). In any case,

¹ However, with the exception of the internment of Japanese Americans in the 1940s, deportation, mass violence and executions were not characteristic of the actions which Diukov cites.

anyone looking for dramatic new revelations based on hitherto unavailable primary sources will be disappointed. Four-fifths of the 115 documents in the collection either have been published previously or are of a type well-known to specialists in the field. Of the previously published material, 34 documents come from Lithuanian volumes, the majority from the studies issued by the International Commission for the Evaluation of the Crimes of the Nazi and Soviet Occupation Regimes in Lithuania. Sixteen have appeared in Russian publications. Of the unpublished documents, 39 are from the Lithuanian Special Archive (LYA) in Vilnius which has been extensively mined by historians. All but two of the 24 unpublished documents from the archives of the Russian Federal Security Service (FSB), the State Archive of the Russian Federation (GARF), the Russian State Military Archive (RGVA) and other venues, touch on matters such as the problem of Polish refugees and organisational details of the deportations, which have nothing to do with the LAF. Some of the LAF documents are taken from copies held by the Hoover Institution at Stanford University. One LAF source from the FSB collection, entitled 'What is the Lithuanian Activist Front', an intensely nationalist tract, does not mention Jews, and, apart from advocating an alliance with Germany, contains little that could be construed as Nazi ideology or plans to stage pogroms (pp. 156–159). This is the only 'new document' which mentions the LAF. That said, one interesting text, a draft of an obsequious memorandum from the PG to the German occupying authorities imploring them to allow the restoration of Lithuania, simply outlines that group's general policy goals: an independent state within a German-led 'New Europe' (pp. 460–464). The fawning tenor of the document is mortifying, but hardly proof that the authors were Nazis or planned to murder Jews.

The main question that should be asked of the compilers is not whether the documents are authentic (they are), or new (most are not). The issue is whether they support Diukov's conclusions concerning Soviet repression and the activities of the anti-Soviet underground, especially the LAF. The selected documents purport to show that the resistance was closely tied to German intelligence. For example, an NKVD report of 18 November, 1940 (pp. 53–59) concerns the detention of the Rev. Alfonsas Sušinskas for conspiring to assist persons fleeing to the Reich, and for contacts with a German bookstore in Kaunas which allegedly served as a Gestapo front (резидентура).² Although never a massive phenomenon, illegal border crossings were not uncommon, they provided the only logical avenue of

² The document contains a curious note: one of the border crossing conspirators claimed that the German government would pay one million litas for the production of evidence 'which would compromise the USSR before Germany and would serve as a pretext to break the agreement [presumably the Nazi-Soviet pact]. This would seem to be either an idle boast or a fantasy peddled by the NKVD stooge within the group.

escape from the Soviet occupation. The reverse, infiltration from Germany, was less frequent: presumably only persons committed to the anti-Soviet resistance would risk such an adventure. There are numerous other documents detailing the detention of resisters and the unearthing of anti-Soviet conspiracies. A good number of sources deal with the proliferation of anti-Soviet leaflets distributed mostly by young people. A 14-year-old schoolgirl from Biržai was detained for tearing up Soviet election posters (p. 85). Anti-Soviet flyers had emerged as a form of resistance from the very first days of the Soviet invasion, and intensified on occasions such as the anniversary of the October revolution and the January 1941 'elections' to the Supreme Soviet.

Where does this leave us in understanding the extent of the threat to Soviet security? How well organised was the resistance, and how significant was its connection to German intelligence? The LAF in Berlin may have envisioned a disciplined underground network directed by its leaders, but this was far from the reality on the ground. Most of the anti-Soviet groups were quite small and short-lived; some existed only on paper. One careful study, based on much the same kind of documents as those in the Diukov collection, maintains that informants and the regime's agents considerably outnumbered the resisters, and concludes that 'it is somewhat problematic to speak of organised resistance.' It seems that both Soviet sources and émigré Lithuanian historians exaggerated the magnitude and effectiveness of an organised underground: the former to justify repressions, the latter to emphasise the scale of patriotic resistance to Sovietisation.³

It strains credibility to think that any of this would seriously threaten the grip of the Kremlin's half-million troops which occupied the Baltics in June 1940. Of course, there was the danger from the outside in the form of Nazi preparations to attack the USSR, evident to British intelligence and the Soviets' own foreign agents, but not apparently to the NKVD-NKGB, which was busy chasing down leaflets. However, despite the apparent weakness of the resistance, Soviet power within Lithuania did face serious challenges. One critical threat can be seen in an extensive NKVD report of January 1941, which does not appear in Diukov's collection. In this 61-page document, NKVD Major Aleksandras Guzevičius describes the pervasive anti-Soviet attitude among the officers and soldiers of the former Lithuanian military who had been marshalled into the Red Army's 29th Territorial Riflemen's Corps. Soviet security concluded that a quarter of the unit's 12,000 men were 'unreliable', and correctly predicted that many embittered officers would likely defect in the event of war.⁴

³ See V. Brandišauskas, *Siekiai atkurti Lietuvos valstybingumą (1940 06–1941 09)* (Vilnius, 1996), pp. 47–52.

⁴ 'Dokladnye zapiski NKVD o politichno-moralnoi sostojanīi 29-go teritorial'nogo korpusa', January 1941, LYA, f. 1771, ap. 2, b. 531; cf. analysis in Brandišauskas, pp. 52–58.

Naturally, dying for Stalin would have made little sense to most ethnic Lithuanian soldiers. But the report highlights more ominous implications. The personnel of the 29th Corps presumably reflected a representative cross-section of Lithuanian society. The attitudes revealed in Guzevičius' report underscore the major dilemma facing the Kremlin's rule in the Baltics: the impressive military and police power of the Stalinist regime masked an elemental political weakness. The Lithuanian SSR failed to achieve acceptance and legitimacy, because much, if not most, of the populace perceived Soviet power as a foreign imposition, an obvious reality to the patriotic young people distributing flyers against the occupiers. On 4 April, 1941, the head of the NKGB in Lithuania, Piotr Gladkov, reported that, when questioned, a 22-year-old Kaunas University student explained that he had participated in an anti-Soviet demonstration organised by the 'Union of Lithuanian Activists-Partisans' (unrelated to the LAF) because he detested Russification and had been indoctrinated in school with the idea 'that Lithuania can only be free as a separate, independent state' (p. 165). Most of the generation which had come of age during the interwar period, ethnic Lithuanians in particular, had come to consider independence as the only legitimate form of national existence.

The reach of the LAF was more evident within the 29th Territorial Corps, especially the 179th Division. Several officers in key positions in Vilnius hatched plans to promote an uprising among the troops at the outset of a German-Soviet war. They were in contact with the LAF in Berlin, which mistakenly informed them that war would break out at the beginning of May. The Soviet police engaged in counterintelligence against Nazi spying and subversion, and in the spring of 1941 had become concerned about the growth of 'counter-revolutionary' groups who hoped to overthrow the regime during the onset of hostilities (pp. 296–298). In early June, the officers' network was broken up and the ringleaders arrested.⁵ The USSR Commissariat for Defence reported that 908 'anti-Soviet' officers from the three Baltic Red Army formations had been arrested (p. 427), including 285 Lithuanians (see p. 430), but this did not prevent desertion and mutiny among the soldiers of the 29th Corps when the Germans invaded.

Interestingly, it seems that the Soviets understood relatively little about how the underground, such as it was, related to the LAF in Berlin. Gladkov reported to Moscow that Nazi intelligence was conducting 'destructive activities' through the 'so-called Lithuanian Committee' resident in Germany (p. 296), possibly a reference to the short-lived and ineffectual 'National Committee' (*Tautinis komitetas*) of Lithuanian diplomats established in Rome in September 1940. But then, the Soviets were not the only ones who were ignorant about the LAF. A leader of the anti-Soviet insurgents

⁵ See J. Jankauskas, *1941 m. birželio sukilimas Lietuvoje* (Vilnius, 2010), pp. 266–287.

in Kaunas, Juozas Vėbra, wrote that he first learned of the organisation after he joined the insurgents on 23 June.⁶ He then realised that he had become an 'activist'. Vėbra's experience was not exceptional.

It is curious that the language employed in the detailed deportation instructions do not, as a rule, make much of foreign threats. As indicated in the NKGB instructions from Moscow of June 1941, 'the deportation of the anti-Soviet element from the Baltic republics constitutes a task of great political importance,' which must be accomplished in a manner not to antagonise 'the part of the surrounding population known to be hostile to Soviet power' (p. 385). These and similar instructions make no mention of the LAF or any vast anti-Soviet networks. There are only passing references to German subversion and diversionary activities. It should be noted that, as far as the Soviet police was concerned, membership alone in certain occupations, political groupings and/or social classes made one a 'counter-revolutionary.' There was no need to prove that a person had actually engaged in anti-state activity to become a candidate for deportation. In 1941, such groups included Trotskyists, Zionists and Catholic youth leaders, as well as right-wing activists and landowners.

Diukov's collection contains a number of LAF documents and texts, including Bronys Raila's lengthy, turgid ideological draft from May 1941 entitled 'What Are the Activists Struggling For?' (pp. 231–291). Raila's racist histrionics and bizarre pseudo-historical ramblings proved too much even for the LAF leadership, and it was never published. (Kazys Škirpa, the LAF's leader, found it 'too sharp'). Few people in Lithuania knew of its existence. Well-known documents, such as the LAF programme (pp. 69–74) and the instructions for an uprising in March 1941 (pp. 116–138), have their share of nationalistic, anti-Semitic and pro-German verbiage. The leaflets which addressed the Jewish question (for example, pp. 159–164, pp. 208–210) which were to be distributed at the outset of the war make clear that the more radical LAF leaders hoped to expel the Jews from Lithuania. But nowhere is there evidence of a plan for genocide.

Numerous sources show that many people, ethnic Lithuanians in particular, were elated at the outbreak of the war, which they understood as liberation. Aside from the success of the German armies, the speed with which Soviet power collapsed during the first hours of the invasion was due in no small part to anti-Russian fury, triggered by the aforementioned deportations. The sense of fear and rage was palpable; it did not need to be fuelled by outside propaganda. Jewish memoirists likened the days before the Nazis arrived as living on a 'powder keg'. Gregory Shur, a chronicler of the Vilnius ghetto, reported in his notes that 'when the war broke out ... many locals considered the Germans their real or potential saviours from the inescapable deportations. Thus, the occupiers found many people

⁶ As quoted in Jankauskas, p. 11.

who sympathised with them, and soon even found helpers who diligently carried out actions planned by them.⁷

This then brings us to the insurrection which broke out on 23 June, the establishment of the short-lived Provisional Government, and the anti-Jewish actions which followed the German invasion. These events have provided fertile ground for myth-making and selective memories. One example in the collection is an article in the newspaper *Žemaičių žemė* from 9 July 1941 entitled 'An Outline on the Activity of the Lithuanian Activist Front', which claims that there were 100,000 members in the LAF and 4,000 martyrs of the June uprising (pp. 445–449). These wildly inflated numbers (by at least a factor of five) bear no semblance to reality, but have been cited by LAF leaders to impress the Germans, and, after the war, by apologists for the Front as proof of widespread patriotism. Curiously, at least one Jewish author cites the same unreal figures as proof of massive collaboration.⁸ It should be the duty of conscientious editors to help readers distinguish self-serving rhetoric from reality.

Other legends abound. To note just a few: former LAF members who have tended to explain away or simply ignore their group's anti-Semitic rhetoric and the public adulation of the Third Reich have, at times, made the astonishing claim that the revolt was also directed against the German occupiers. On the other side are people who have fantasised that the head of the PG Juozas Ambrazevičius (aka Brazaitis) actually sent thousands to their deaths with a stroke of the pen, or that the June uprising constituted a 'fifth column' which stabbed the Red Army in the back (as if one could betray the occupiers of one's homeland).

Contrary to the naïve dreams of men like Škirpa and some of his cohort, Lithuania did not become an Axis ally of the Third Reich, with control of its own military and domestic security services. The PG was not Ante Pavelić's Croatian regime, and the LAF was not the Ustaše movement. From the very first hours of the invasion, the Wehrmacht and the German security police had effective command-and-control over Lithuanian territory. The Nazis always had the final say of what happened to the Jews. As early as 1 July, SS Lt. Col. Erich Ehrlinger sent a report to Berlin: he had already formed five companies of Lithuanian 'partisans', one of which, he wrote, carried out executions under his orders.⁹ Considering the realities on the ground, it is unlikely that many of these men were members of the LAF.

⁷ G. Šuras, *Užrašai: Vilniaus geto kronika 1941–1944*, tr. N. Kvaraciejūtė, A. Antanavičius (Vilnius, 1997), p. 23.

⁸ See S. Shner-Neshamit, 'Lithuanian-Jewish Relations during World War II: History and Rhetoric', *Bitter Legacy: Confronting the Holocaust in the USSR*, ed. Z. Gitelman (Bloomington, 1997), p. 170.

⁹ Ehrlinger Report to RSHA and Einsatzgruppe A, 1 July 1941, from Bundesarchiv (Koblenz), copy provided to author.

What then can we conclude about the responsibility of the PG and the LAF? None of the documents in the collection prove that either the LAF leaders or the PG advocated outright genocide. The Commandant of Kaunas Col. Jurgis Bobelis reported to the PG cabinet and claimed nominal authority over the city until mid-July. During its 25 June (second) meeting, the PG cabinet sought to 'eliminate from among the partisans the undesirable element', and on the next day, after noting that 'the security forces are working badly and there are arrests and searches of people who are entirely innocent', identified the undesirables as 'partisans of the Klimaitis group which does not act with the Staff of the Lithuanian Armed Forces.'¹⁰ The 27 June cabinet minutes reveal that minister Žemkalnis 'reported on the extremely cruel torture of the Jews at the Lietūkis garage in Kaunas.' In response, the resolution as recorded in the minutes makes sense, although the tone and context is more incriminating than exculpatory: 'Decided [underlined in the original]: Regardless of all the actions which must be taken against the Jews for their communist activity and harm to the German army, partisans and individual inhabitants should avoid public executions of Jews. It has been learned that such actions are carried out by people who have nothing in common with the Activist Staff, the Partisans' Staff, or the Lithuanian Provisional Government.'¹¹ At the same time, the country's leading Catholic cleric, Metropolitan Archbishop Juozas Skvireckas, who noted with approval some passages from *Mein Kampf*, expressed his shock at the Lietūkis killings and sent his assistant to Kaunas to intervene in halting such excesses.¹² In another instance, the PG's chief prosecutor in Šiauliai, Matas Krygeris, wrote a memorandum to the local district chief pleading for a halt to the wanton arrests and killings of ethnic Lithuanians on the flimsy suspicion of communism.¹³ Effectively blockaded by the Germans, the PG resigned on 5 August 1941. The ministers stated for the record that they did not have the means 'to prevent the execution of Jews in Kaunas and the provinces'. The government left their offices just as the wave of extermination of the country's provincial Jews was gathering momentum towards a 'final solution'.¹⁴ In September, the former acting prime minister of the PG, worried about Lithuania's reputation and postwar consequences, visited Metropolitan Skvireckas to propose that the

¹⁰ Such 'armed forces', of course, existed only in the imagination of the PG.

¹¹ *Lietuvos laikinoji vyriausybė: posėdžių protokolai*, ed. A. Anušauskas (Vilnius, 2001), pp. 11–18.

¹² 1941 m. sukilimas: dokumentų rinkinys, ed. V. Brandišauskas, (Vilnius, 2000), p. 274; *Išgelbėję pasaulį... Žydų gelbėjimas Lietuvoje*, eds. D. Kuodytė, R. Stankevičius (Vilnius, 2001), pp. 109–112.

¹³ A. Eidintas, *Lietuvos žydų žudynių byla* (Vilnius, 2001), pp. 127–128.

¹⁴ C. Dieckmann, S. Sužiedėlis, *Lietuvos žydų persekiojimas ir masinės žudynės 1941 m. vasarą ir rudenį. The Persecution and Mass Murder of Lithuanian Jews during the Summer and Fall of 1941* (Vilnius, 2006).

country's notables publicly repudiate the massacres of the Jews, but the archbishop demurred and nothing came of the project.¹⁵ Not surprisingly, none of these events finds a place in *On the Eve*.

Despite their well-documented flattering of Hitler, nationalist rhetoric and hatred of Stalinism, these are not the statements or actions of people planning mass murder. Nonetheless, theirs is a heavy burden. Local officials, some of whom were members of the LAF, took an active part in segregating and expropriating the Jews, well documented in the case of the Joniškis 'activists' and elsewhere.¹⁶ It is obvious that under a LAF-dominated government, the Jews could expect, at best, if not expulsion, then systematic apartheid and wholesale expropriation. More important was the egregious propaganda of the local press, the LAF and the Vilnius Citizens' Committee, which demonised the Jews.¹⁷ Given the explosive aftermath of the deportations and the ethnic tensions which had intensified during the year of Soviet rule,¹⁸ this amounted to incitement. Formalistic calls in the press not to seek vengeance, to maintain public order and let the courts punish Soviet collaborators were weak admonitions when compared to the overwhelming rhetoric of hatred.

The most violent anti-Semitic Lithuanian contingent consisted of the so-called Voldemarists, who adopted a world-view consistent with, in their words, 'the new racial ideals of fascism and national socialism'. These self-styled crypto-Nazis were rivals of the LAF and sought to overthrow the PG as insufficiently pro-German, but they were not widely popular. A number of them were to take part directly in the genocide.¹⁹ These men, who would have gladly established an Ustaše-like regime, if given the chance, do not figure in Diukov's collection as actors 'on the eve of the Holocaust'.

Diukov claims that before May 1941 the Kremlin's organs of state security based their actions on a response to a real threat, and, 'as a rule, did not engage in persecution against any kind of national or social categories of the population.' This will undoubtedly displease Baltic historians

¹⁵ I am indebted to Dr Arūnas Streikus for providing me with an excerpt of Skvireckas' notes found in the Archive of the Kaunas Curia (Kauno Arkivyskupijos kurijos archyvas), b. 175, l. 181.

¹⁶ For the Joniškis LAF, see *1941 m. sukilimas*, pp. 253–261.

¹⁷ For just one example (and by no means the worst), note the very first issue of the LAF newspaper *Į laisvę*, 24 June 1941, which proclaimed: 'Jews and Bolshevism are one and the same.'

¹⁸ See S. Sužiedėlis, 'Listen, the Jews are Ruling Us Now: Antisemitism and National Conflict during the First Soviet Occupation, 1940–1941', *Polin: Studies in Polish Jewry*, 25 (2013), pp. 305–330.

¹⁹ There is interesting evidence in Z. Blynas, *Karo metų dienoraštis 1941–1944 m.*, intro. G. Rudis (Vilnius, 2007).

who are unlikely to be mollified by Diukov's recognition of the arbitrary and cruel nature of the deportations, and his insistence that they differed from the 'legitimate' repressions aimed at 'real anti-government activity against the USSR and the LSSR' (p. 25). Nor are they likely to agree that it was the anti-Soviet resistance and not the NKVD, who 'planned and, eventually carried out, mass crimes against humanity'. To claim that resistance to an inherently malevolent system is ipso facto some sort of offence or betrayal is a suspect argument. The problem with the LAF is not that they fought the Soviet occupation, but that they seemed oblivious to the true nature of Nazism. Some in the organisation were enthralled with the power of 'Greater Germany'. Worse still, they failed miserably the moral litmus test in their treatment of their fellow Jewish citizens.

The major problem with this book is that the reader will not get an adequate picture of Lithuania's situation 'on the eve of the Holocaust'. Neither will one gain a proper understanding of the nature of Soviet repression in the Baltics in 1940–1941, since this compendium avoids analysis of the wider context of Soviet history during the two years (1939–1941) when the Kremlin engaged in a tactical partnership (some say alliance) with Nazi Germany. Soviet actions should be seen within the broader geopolitical context. The Secret Supplementary Protocol to the Soviet-German Boundary and Friendship Treaty of 28 September 1939 stipulated: 'Both parties will tolerate in their territories no Polish agitation which affects the territories of the other party. They will suppress in their territories all beginnings of such agitation and inform each other concerning suitable measures for this purpose.' One of the results of this programme was the arrest of nearly 100,000 Polish citizens and the Soviet deportation in four months (February–June 1940) of, at the very least, some 300,000 people, mainly from eastern Poland. In April 1940, Stalin initiated the first mass murder of Allied military personnel during the Second World War, the shooting of more than 20,000 Polish prisoners of war at Katyn forest and other locations.

What this tells us is that just as war and genocide constituted integral components of Nazism, targeted mass murder, the camps and deportations were indispensable features of the Stalinist order. The Kremlin's crimes were systemic, not contingent. The compilers of this volume, however, clearly seek to 'normalize' the Stalinist system as one that was simply struggling to avert a legitimate foreign threat. Another tactic in the attempt to make Stalinist crimes less than they were is to make false comparisons. A good example of this is a piece by the selfsame Diukov entitled 'On Ethnic Expulsions and Deportations of "Dangerous Elements": Lithuanian and Soviet Deportation Actions in Lithuania, 1939–1941'.²⁰ This

²⁰ A. Diukov, 'Ot etnicheskoi vysilki i deportatsii 'opasnogo elementa': litovskie i sovetskie deportatsionnye aktsii v Litve, 1939–1941 gg.', *Zhurnal Rossiiskikh i Vostochnoevropeiskikh istoricheskikh issledovaniĭ*, no. 1(4) (2012), pp. 101–106.

six-page sketch seeks to equate the aforementioned Soviet deportations of June 1941 with the admittedly problematic policies of the Lithuanian government in the newly acquired Vilnius region (November 1939–June 1940). Diukov regrets that there is no reliable information concerning the number and fate of Polish ‘deportees’ sent from Vilnius to other parts of Lithuania during this period. Actually, the number is certainly less than one thousand, including some 600 students sent to the town of Žagarė. There is no record that anyone died.²¹ Diukov compares this to the June 1941 Soviet deportations, in which twentyfold more people were exiled to distant, inhospitable regions where many died of cold and starvation. He concludes that both the Kremlin and ‘small Eastern European states’ sought to neutralise potential ‘disloyalty’ through similar tactics. This equal sign between two vastly different experiences is obviously meant to obfuscate the reality that, at its core, Stalin’s was a criminal regime, and it remained such throughout the Second World War and beyond.

Aleksandr Diukov is a controversial figure. It is safe to say that he is viewed by most serious historians as someone who tends to downplay the crimes of the Stalin period. A search of the database of his ‘Historical Memory’ Fund to Assist Timely Historical Research (<<http://www.history-foundation.ru>>) will find that there is a unifying theme to the publications the group supports: an uncritically heroic view of the Soviet side in the Second World War and the portrayal of virtually all resistance to Soviet power as inspired by fascist ideology.

How should one react to distortions and simplifications such as those in Diukov’s *On the Eve*? Baltic historians in particular do themselves a disservice if their reaction remains merely defensive. It does no good to attempt to minimise the serious mistakes of organisations such as the LAF and PG, or to downplay the role of those local citizens who participated in the Nazi genocide of the Jews. The Holocaust was, after all, the bloodiest page in Lithuania’s modern history. This, however, does not change the fact that, for those Lithuanians, Latvians and Estonians who did not have to wear the yellow star, the Soviet experience of 1940–1941 was only the harbinger of a far more violent period after the Red Army and the Stalinist police returned to the region in 1944. Naturally, this will not be apparent to the unaware reader who might peruse this book.

Saulius Sužiedėlis

²¹ P. Łossowski, *Likwidacja Uniwersytetu Stepana Batorego przez władze litewskie w grudniu 1939 roku: Materiały i dokumenty* (Warsaw, 1991), pp. 14–15.