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THE RESETTLEMENTS OF GERMANS FROM LITHUANIA DURING WORLD WAR II

The matter of resettlements during World War II arouses continual interest. In this context it is worthwhile recalling the role played by the Nazis who initiated the removal of the Germans from Eastern Europe. In this way they originated the events which had wide and far-reaching repercussions.

I have already presented the resettlement of the Germans from the Baltic Region — Latvia and Estonia in a “Acta Poloniae Historica”¹. I would like to present here, also as briefly as possible, the resettlements of Germans from Lithuania in the years 1941–1944. Although connected with the previous issue, they had a specificity and significance of their own. This was an unprecedented event among the many resettlement actions perpetrated by the Nazis. In fact the Lithuanian Germans were first transported to the West, and later to the East again. In this case it was quite clear that the German authorities treated their compatriots in an instrumental way.

In the German optics Lithuania was a transitory country, a bridge leading to three German provinces of Russia: Courland, Livonia and Estonia. In contrast to the Baltic Region, the Germans had never dominated in the area of Lithuania. Nevertheless, they were a conspicuous national group, with greater influence on the economy than on politics².

The Germans marked their presence in Lithuania as long back as the times of Gedimin, although their number was small. In the 18th century, as a result of migration and the spreading

¹ P. Łossowski, *The Resettlement of the Germans from the Baltic States 1939–1941*, “Acta Poloniae Historica”, vol. 92, 2005, pp. 79–98.

² Cf. R. Haberle, *Die Deutschen in Litauen*, Stuttgart 1927, p. 2.

plague, they almost disappeared from Lithuania³. German newcomers started to appear since the end of the 18th century and this migration lasted almost throughout the 19th century. They settled mainly near the border. The peasants chose the districts close to Eastern Prussia, such as Vilkaviškis, where they constituted 12.5% of the total population, or Šakiai 4.2%, Taurage 3.4%. Here the land was the most fertile and communication network the most developed. The newcomers generally bought small or middle-size farms, but they did not create whole villages as it was the case of the Germans on the Volga river or in the Ukraine, but at best small agglomerations dispersed among Lithuanian villages. There were few large estates, generally in central and northern Lithuania, most frequently owned by the Baltic Germans, many of whom received land from the Russian authorities as a reward for their services (e.g. the Totlebens).

Those who settled in towns were mostly craftsmen. There were also many Germans employed in industry, e.g. masters and skilled workers in metallurgical factories of Tillmans and Schmidt, who were predominantly German. The biggest urban agglomeration of the Germans (with 3.5 thousand people of that nationality) was Kaunas, the total population of which was a hundred thousand⁴.

The total number of Germans in Lithuania, without the Klaipėda Region (German: Memel), was according to the census of 1923 29,231 people. It is true that German activists used to estimate it at 40–50 thousand, but scholarly German literature calls that number into question as clearly exaggerated⁵.

The Lithuanian Germans were not well organized — in this respect they could not stand comparison with the Baltic Germans. Their religious and social life had long been centred round the evangelical parishes — however, in 1923 there were only 16 pastors in the whole of Lithuania. The German school system, however, was well developed. In 1924 there were 24 elementary schools, one secondary school and one higher school. Boarding schools were an important part of this system.

³ It was even written that at that time Lithuania saw *Untergang des Deutschtums*, cf. e.g. H. Stossun, *Die Umsiedlung der Deutschen aus Litauen während des Zweiten Weltkrieges. Untersuchungen zum Schicksal einer deutschen Volksgruppe im Osten*, Marburg 1993.

⁴ R. Haberle, *op. cit.*, pp. 35, 41–43, 89.

⁵ H. Stossun, *op. cit.*, p. 113.

The matters of education were dealt with by the *Kulturverband*, with about 2.5 thousand members. The Party of Lithuanian Germans was not very active, although in the 1923 elections it gained 16 thousand votes and two seats in the Lithuanian Parliament. The small number of the readers of the "Litauische Rundschau" newspaper showed that the Germans were not very interested in politics.

The German population became more active only in 1939, certainly as a result of the events in Klaipėda. Demands were made to observe the German spelling of names in Lithuanian passports, some people declared their German nationality.

The outbreak of war and the resultant division of this area into the spheres of influence of the USSR and Germany caused the evacuation of panic-struck Germans from Latvia and Estonia. The Lithuanian Germans were not affected by this action. For what reasons? The most important was certainly the fact that as a result of the new divisions established in Moscow on September 28, 1939, a small part of the territory of Lithuania, which as a whole was embraced by the Soviet sphere of influence, still remained in the area of German interests. This strip, situated in the south-western part of the country, included the area most densely populated by the Germans, among others the above-mentioned Vilkaviškis district. One third of Lithuanian Germans lived precisely in this area.

The Nazi leaders could hardly imagine they would have to remove the Germans from the territory which, according to the treaty, was recognized as the German domain. But there were other reasons as well.

On 14–15 October 1939 a higher official of the Third Reich, Rudolf Tesmann, visited Lithuania "for information purposes". His concern was the possibility of the evacuation of the Germans. Later he wrote they were badly organized and had no definite leadership. He pointed out that many Germans were classified in their passports as Lithuanians. He cited the opinion of Erich Zechlin, the envoy of the Reich in Kaunas, that the departure of the Germans was nothing urgent, since any political and social changes in Lithuania could be expected no sooner than in 1/2 or one year⁶.

⁶R. Haberle, *op. cit.*, pp. 136–137.

The letter of the Head of the Politico-Cultural Department of the Foreign Office of the Third Reich, Fritz von Twardowsky, dated 24 October 1939, concerning the departure of the Germans from Lithuania, includes the following characteristic statement: the term of resettlement depends on the political decisions concerning the future German-Lithuanian border. On the other hand, the withdrawal of the Germans from Northern or Central Lithuania might arouse undesirable interpretations⁷.

The German Foreign Office took a stand complying with the above-mentioned suggestions. On 27 October it declared that the withdrawal of the Germans from Lithuania was not urgent at the moment⁸.

As a consequence the decision was made not to commence talks with the Lithuanian government on the subject of evacuation. Confidential information said that the SS *Reichsführer* in charge of resettlements did not want to remove the Germans from Lithuania before the spring of 1940⁹.

At that time, while the German authorities kept silent, and the Lithuanian government denied the rumour about the withdrawal of the Germans from Lithuania, some preparations were nevertheless secretly under way. All this work was centred in the hands of the *Kulturverband*. They established the numbers and the lists of the Germans. A resettlement committee was formed, plans for migration was elaborated, even evacuation routes were designated. Oskar Reichardt, the head of the *Kulturverband*, declared in Berlin in December 1939: "we shall leave our fatherland with a heavy heart, but we shall go where the *Führer* leads us"¹⁰.

Nevertheless, for several months to come the Lithuanian Germans remained relatively untroubled in their homeland. A change came suddenly in the middle of June, 1940. As is well known the Soviet government delivered an ultimatum, demanding that Lithuania allow the introduction into its territory of unlimited forces of the Red Army as well as a change of its

⁷ D. Loeber, *Diktirte Opton. Die Umsiedlung der Deutsch-Balten aus Estland und Lettland 1939-1941. Dokumentation*, Neumünster 1972, doc. 176, pp. 255-258.

⁸ *Ibid.*, doc. 177, pp. 260-261.

⁹ *Ibid.*, doc. 179, pp. 262-263.

¹⁰ Cit. from A. L. Arbušauskaitė, *Gyventojų, mainiai tarp Lietuvos ir Vokietijos pagal 1941 metų sausio 10 dienos sutartį*, Klaipėda 2002, pp. 41-42.

government. This meant that the independent Lithuanian state ceased to exist.

The units of the Red Army were installed all over the territory of Lithuania. The tanks and the infantry did not stop for a moment on the boundary of the German sphere of interests and invaded the whole country, right up to the borders of the state.

After 15 June 1940 Germany changed its position on the question of the evacuation of Germans from Lithuania. It passed from the stage of preparations to the stage of implementation. Envoy Zachlin's note prepared for the German Foreign Office on 22 June 1940, throws eloquent light on the situation that emerged. The envoy described in it the events in Lithuania and drew attention to the danger that might result from them for the local Germans. He wrote that evacuation should be prepared in foreseeable time. It must be preceded by an agreement with Moscow. The envoy expressed the view that the resettlement of the German national group would be welcomed by the Soviet side. "Especially", he stressed, "the Russians will understand this resettlement as the most eloquent proof that the Germans have finally ceased to be interested in Lithuania"¹¹.

On June 25 Ribbentrop issued instructions about the removal of the Germans from Lithuania. Negotiations with the Lithuanian side on this subject were to be conducted by the German Foreign Office¹².

As it could be expected, the restrictions introduced by the new authorities affected also the German minority. Among the forbidden newspapers there was also a German one. All organizations were dissolved, including the *Kulturverband*. A declaration was issued about the nationalization of land. The Germans were promised to be treated exceptionally, however, this rule was not always applied in practice. The legation received letters about cases of expropriation, and alarming news of frequent arrests¹³.

On July 8 envoy Zechlin informed Berlin that as a result of the forthcoming incorporation of Lithuania in the USSR and the advancing Sovietization of the country the atmosphere among the local Germans "was becoming very tense"¹⁴.

¹¹ D. Loeber, *op. cit.*, doc. 180, pp. 263-265.

¹² *Ibid.*, doc. 181, pp. 265-266.

¹³ A. L. Arbušauskaitė, *op. cit.*, pp. 44-45.

¹⁴ D. Loeber, doc. 182, p. 266.

On July 11 the legation received the news that the German ambassador in Moscow was authorized to communicate to the Soviet government that Germany intended to withdraw the German population from Lithuania. On the other hand, Lithuanians from the region of Klaipėda and from the Suwałki district should come to Lithuania. "Naturally", the telegram emphasized, "the action of resettlement of the Germans from Lithuania should not embrace the strip of territory which in accordance with the rectification of the border on the strength of the agreement of September 1939 will be incorporated in Germany in due time"¹⁵.

However, merely two days later the Foreign Office of the Reich received surprising news from Ambassador Schulenburg that the Soviet government was creating obstacles to returning "the strip of the Lithuanian territory". Stalin and Molotov insisted that "in the name of especially friendly relations between Germany and the USSR" a solution should be found on the strength of which the said area "would for ever remain with Lithuania". One can see clearly that the Soviet side used the word "Lithuania" deliberately, since this country was not yet formally incorporated in the USSR, although such an outcome of affairs could be expected in the nearest future¹⁶.

The Germans, of necessity, had to agree, but they never forgot the humiliation of being faced with accomplished facts.

On July 22 Himmler as the Commissioner of the Reich for the consolidation of the German character issued instructions for the preparation of resettlements of Germans from Lithuania. The organization to deal with it was called *Volksdeutsche Mittelstelle* (VoMi). The resettlements were to be finished before the winter of 1940/1941¹⁷.

However, the whole action might be carried out only in consultation with the Soviet government, as a result of bilateral negotiations. These were delayed week by week.

The legation in Kaunas was sending ever more pressing admonitions. In the telegram of August 21 they wrote about the increasingly difficult situation of the German minority, arrests, expropriations, dismissals from work. They emphasized that the

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, doc. 183, p. 267.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, doc. 184, p. 268.

¹⁷ For the complete text of Himmler's instruction of 22 July 1940 see: D. Loeber, *op. cit.*, doc. 186, pp. 270–271.

uncertainty whether the departure would be possible caused growing unrest among the Lithuanian Germans¹⁸.

However, it took another month before on September 22 two delegations — German and Soviet — met in Kaunas. They both had many members — on the German side most of them were the SS officers, on the Soviet side there were many NKVD functionaries.

Until October 10 the negotiations went smoothly. Both sides managed to establish the procedure of the resettlement. However, things became more difficult when the settlement of mutual accounts entered the agenda. Both sides turned out to be extremely greedy. The Germans elaborated a price-list for the estimators of the property left by the evacuees, which embraced literally everything. Side by side with the price of land, meadows, forests and buildings they included the value of bee-hives, gooseberry and currant bushes, etc. Everything was calculated with German precision to the single mark. All this added up to 200 mil. RM, an enormous sum by the then standards, which was presented to the Russians¹⁹. The latter, in their turn, put forward a demand to be paid for the Lithuanian property left in Klaipeda. In face of the unyielding attitude of both partners in November 1940 the negotiations reached a deadlock. Since there were divergencies not only with regard to the matter of resettlement, it became clear that a wider agreement was indispensable.

The findings of the Lithuanian researcher, Arūnė Arbušauskaitė show that Soviet intelligence took advantage of the presence of the representatives of the Reich in Kaunas to penetrate the secrets of the German delegation. Copies were made of 420 confidential documents. The Soviet side got access to the German plans, discovered the German tactics of negotiation, learnt of the ways of smuggling valuables belonging to the Germans preparing for departure, and, most important, of the broader designs of Germany in relation to the USSR²⁰.

The Soviet side probably protracted the negotiations in order to learn more. But this was effective only up to a point. Both sides wanted to avoid misunderstandings, not only concerning resettlement.

¹⁸ D. Loeber, *op. cit.*, doc. 185, p.269.

¹⁹ Cf. J. Sobczak, *Hitlerowskie przemieszczenia ludności niemieckiej w dobie II wojny światowej (The Nazi Resettlements of the German Population During World War II)*, Poznań 1966, pp. 210–211.

²⁰ A. L. Arbušauskaitė, *op. cit.*, p. 51.

tlement but also mutual demands, and in the first place, to regulate the matter of the border. The main talks were held in Moscow. It was there that at the end of December 1940 decision was made to sign the whole set of agreements concerning economic matters, the regulation of mutual financial claims, the matter of borders, as well as the resettlement of Lithuanian Germans and other ethnic Germans who still remain in Estonia and Latvia²¹.

Agreements were signed on 10 January 1941. The document concerning the resettlement in the Reich of Germans from the Lithuanian SSR and Lithuanians and Russians from Germany in the LSSR contained a very detailed regulation of the whole matter. It spoke of the procedure of resettlement and defined what property could be taken away by the resettled persons²².

The preparations and realization of departures entailed many misunderstandings and conflicts. The Germans complained that the property belonging to the resettled people was put up to auction before it was presented to the customs officers, and about many cases of confiscation of the property of those who were leaving²³.

Despite the difficulties encountered, large numbers of Germans turned up at departure points. The literature justly draws attention to the fact that the Germans were actually deprived of the right of choice. In case of refusal, both the German and Soviet authorities would treat persons guilty of such resistance as "a hostile element" and this would entail very unpleasant consequences. E.g. 73 Germans who registered for departure and later withdraw, were deported up-country of the USSR in June 1941²⁴.

As a result of the resettlement action lasting from February 2, till March 23, 1941, over 50 thousand people left Lithuania. This was a very large number, considerably surpassing the numbers of genuine Germans. This was because many Lithuanians, in fear of Soviet repressions, sought rescue in a departure for Germany. Family relationships with Germans were eagerly discovered, or simply false documents were procured. The Germans pretended not to notice this, and the Soviets were not always able to prevent it.

²¹ *Dokumenty Vneshney Politiki (DVP)*, vol. 23, part I, pp. 217–218.

²² *DVP*, op. cit., doc. 642, pp. 306–317.

²³ *Ibid.*, doc. 709, p. 457.

One of the resettled people, Eudrius Jankus, recollected that at the station in Tilsit he saw many would-be Germans from Lithuania who could not speak a word of German²⁵.

Here I should mention also the simultaneous departure in the opposite direction. A total number of 20,695 people arrived in the Lithuanian SSR. Among them 6,167 people came from Klaipeda and 14,528 people from the Polish part of the Suwałki district occupied by Germans. Those who came from Klaipeda were exclusively Lithuanians, while among those who left the Suwałki (German: Sudauen) district there were 8,915 Russians, predominantly old-believers and 5,613 Lithuanians.

The departures, especially from the Suwałki district, were enforced. One of the victims recollected: "The Germans threatened the Lithuanians and forced them to leave in a hurry, since in another case they would all be deported to Germany or shot together with the Jews"²⁶.

After coming to Lithuania the newcomers were mainly settled on the farms left by the Germans, and generally received 8 ha of land.

In the meantime the Germans displaced from Lithuania were directed to transit camps, situated in various places. 10 thousand people came to Mecklenburg, 11.5 thousand to Pomerania, 4.5 thousand to Eastern Prussia, and most of them (as many as 23.3 thousand) to the so-called Wartheland.

This is what the above cited Eudrius Jankus wrote about his impressions of his new place of residence: "We arrived in Zduńska Wola. Here we found a number of 2–3 story buildings which had once belonged to Jews. The SS-men assigned to us the third floor (...). Three months later we were transported to Człuchów in Pomerania. Here we placed behind barbed wire, watched by the guards"²⁷.

In contrast to the Baltic Germans resettled at the end of 1939, who were promptly placed on the farms taken from the Poles — no haste was made with the Germans coming from Lithuania. Their stay in transit camps continued for months. The Nazi authorities used this period for detailed control and for checking their political and racial usefulness.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, app. 48, pp. 279–280.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 116 and 122–124.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, app. 48, p. 280.

Inspections were conducted by a special team of 367 people, who moved from one camp to another. It consisted of 10 officers, and 8 SS doctors as well as the experts of the Chief Office for the Matters of Race and Resettlement. The examination of racial usefulness was very precise, measurements were taken of human skulls, the colour of eyes and hair was also taken into consideration. Detailed inquiries were made as to the degree of a given person's German links, and Jewish roots had to be ruled out. The knowledge of the German language and links with the German culture were also tested. Effort was made to establish the aptitude of the resettled people for "the national combat in the East". The latter criterion determined whether a given person could be directed to the Polish lands occupied by the Nazis in the East, or, as a less secure element, would be directed to the *Altreich* (old territory of the German Reich), where surveillance of such person would be easier.

The results of three tests were not very favourable to the evacuees. A category, that is resettlement in the *Altreich*, was granted to 43.7% that is 21,998 people, while 0 category, that is a possibility to be directed to the East was gained by 55.8% that is 28,131 evacuees from Lithuania²⁸.

All these examinations and segregation lasted until October 1941. At that time German-Soviet war broke out and the political situation changed completely. Occupied Lithuania was incorporated in the *Ostland* as the General Commissariat. The fate of the Germans evacuated from Lithuania was to be determined at the highest level, in accordance with the far-reaching plans of the Third Reich in the East²⁹.

These plans crystallized gradually and were the outcome of various tendencies. Erich Koch, East Prussian *Gauleiter's* initial design to colonize the left bank of the Niemen river, remove Lithuanians from the area and create a buffer zone near the eastern border of Germany, was discarded.

According to Hitler's conception the solution to be adopted was not partial but general (*grossdeutsche Losung*), and on it strength Germans were to be settled not only on the left but also the right bank of the Niemen river. Although Hitler's intentions

²⁸ J. Sobczak, *op. cit.*, pp. 217-219.

²⁹ Cf. C. Madajczyk, *Generalny Plan Wschodni (The General Eastern Plan)*, in: *Faszyzm i okupacje*, vol. 1, Poznań 1983, pp. 719-727.

were not quite clear it could be understood that he treated the border with Lithuania as an internal border of the Reich. He was said to mention to his subordinates that Lithuanian Germans wanted to return, but he warned that "this process should be carried out cautiously, so as to avoid a rapid influx of resettled people".

These words were treated as a directive for action. A plan was worked out to create "a colonization bridge" that would reach from Eastern Prussia to Riga. This "bridge" run across the territory of Lithuania along two axes. One was to extend from Vilkaviškis through Marijampole–Kaunas–Kedainiai–Panevėžys–Biržai, the other from Tilsit through Tauragai–Šiauliai–Jelgava.

Soon after, in the autumn of 1941 Himmler was presented with a plan to settle colonists in the districts of Kaunas, Vilka-viškis, Marijampole, Šakiai, Roseiniai, Tauragai. The General Commissioner of Lithuania Adrian von Renteln, added to them the districts of Šiauliai, Panevėžys and Biržai³⁰.

In the nex months these plans were taking a more concrete shape and continually extended. Western Lithuania was indicated as a special area of resettlement. "Taking into consideration the great significance of the Baltic region" it was envisaged to settle there over half a million Germans within 25 years. Himmler reduced this time to twenty years³¹.

This was, however, still a distant future. For the time being, only the evacuees from Lithuania remained at hand. They were not only to return to their farms, but also to receive immediately more land. It was envisaged to settle a large group of them also in central and northern Lithuania, where Germans had never lived before.

It was assumed that the whole action would not be varried out at the cost of Lithuanian population. Renteln took care not to spread ill-feeling among them. The indispensable land fund was to be created out of the former property of the Jews, as well as Russians and Poles. In practice, the Jews, who had not owned any larger landed property in Lithuania, had already been murdered, only some remained in the ghettos. Russians, mainly peasants and old-believers, generally owned very small farms.

³⁰ A. L. Arbušauskaitė, *op. cit.*, pp. 150–151 and app. 11, p. 238.

³¹ S. Mylleniemi, *Die Neuordnung der Baltischen Länder 1941–1944. Zum nationalsozialistischen Inhalt der deutschen Besatzungspolitik*, Helsinki 1973, pp. 158–160.

One could easily foresee that the main “suppliers” of additional land for the colonists would be Poles. Within the borders of the Republic of Lithuania before 1939 this concerned the surviving landowners who remained here and there on 30 ha estates left to them by the Soviets. Those who came into play were also minor farmers derived from yeomen who formed considerable agglomerations in the environs of Kaunas.

The invaders created an extensive organizational structure to carry out the resettlement action. The special plenipotentiary for the matters of the return of the Germans to Lithuania was nobody else but the General Commissioner Renteln. His staff, headed by SS *Sturmabführer* Joachim Duckart, took residence in Kaunas. It was also represented by many offices in the province.

Lithuanian national interests were most acutely affected by the plan of building a colonization “bridge” from East Prussia to Riga. The area inhabited by Lithuanians, their ethnic territory, was to be disrupted and disintegrated by a belt of foreign settlements. This was a foreboding of a sinister future, a prospect of annihilation.

Nevertheless, when the Germans asked the representatives of the Lithuanian auxiliary administration for help, they did not encounter any resistance of the collaborationists. Two general councillors, Juozas Petronis and Juozas Narakas — following the order of Renteln, on 20 July 1942 issued an instruction calling into being a Home Civil Commission for the Matters of Resettlement³².

The instruction said that the Lithuanians who so far had administered the property of German repatriates should return to their old farms. If this proved impossible, they should be given farms in other places. A land fund was established for them. This fund was created out of: a) The farms of “active Poles”, b) The farms left by German repatriates, c) the farms that previously belonged to Jews, d) The farms of Russians. The Poles and Russians removed from their farms were to live on the farms of other representatives of their nationality in the same district, and in the case this was impossible, beyond its borders³³.

The first Germans who returned to Lithuania started coming in the middle of June 1942. They arrived in small groups, mainly to see what the situation in this area looked like.

³² K. Rukšėnas, *I vergovė*, Vilnius 1966, p. 38.

³³ A. L. Arbušauskaitė, *op. cit.*, app. 15, pp. 236–238.

The first thing they saw was the proclamation issued by the General Commissioner Renteln, saying: "You are not returning to a hostile, but a friendly country. Take this into consideration before you make any decisions. Every resettled person will represent the Great Reich as a German and a farmer. Be good neighbours to Lithuanians, but prove by your words and actions that you are genuine Germans"³⁴.

This is what Heinrich Abel, deputy of the Resettlement General Staff reported to his superiors on July 12, 1942 in connection with the return of the Germans "A tendency one can observe among the resettled people is to return to their own, even small farms. No serious incidents could be noticed. The Lithuanian self-government was very well prepared for this resettlement. Those returning were welcomed ceremonially at the border. In case of sabotage on the part of Russians or Poles, a death sentence will be applied"³⁵.

The returning Germans generally found their old farms occupied by the Lithuanians and Russians who came from Klaipeda or the Polish Suwałki district. As far as the Russians were concerned, nobody bothered about their fate. They were simply removed and told to look for shelter in the villages of old-believers in the Kaunas district, especially in the vicinity of Jonava. On the other hand, in the case of Lithuanians, the issue to be faced was finding for them as soon as possible other farms. First they were sought within the borders of their old districts, and later in more distant areas. Those who were forced to give up their property to Lithuanians, were generally Poles.

Their lists were prepared beforehand. However, the persons in question were those who had lived in the Lithuanian state for years as Lithuanian citizens, most frequently deeply rooted in their surroundings. They addressed the authorities with their complaints and appeals, desperately defending their property. The Lithuanian historian Arunas Bubnys writes that the district resettlement commissions and other offices were literally inundated with their letters³⁶.

The very term "active Poles", used in the above-mentioned instruction of 20 July 1942, was not clear. The lack of clarity as

³⁴ *Ibid.*, app. 12, p. 233.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, app. 13, p. 234.

³⁶ A. Bubnys, *Vokiečių okupuota Lietuva 1941-1944*, Vilnius 1998, p. 354.

to who was “an active Pole”, and who was “passive” opened a wide field for interpretation and abuse. The more so, because the organs of local administration that in fact carried out the resettlement, worked on the basis of formal instructions. And these directives said that while creating the “land fund” attention should be paid to scrupulous exclusion of the farms of Lithuanian families as well as “the farms of nationally mixed families, with at least one Lithuanian member³⁷. Therefore the boundary was frequently blurred between a Lithuanian family and one that was still Polish.

A characteristic case cited in the literature was that of an agronomist from the Ukmerge districts, whose name figured as that of a Pole on the list of persons who were to create the “land fund”. This man made energetic endeavours in defence of his property, making use of his connexions and the old system of relationships. His case was discussed at various levels, by both Lithuanian and German officials. The final verdict was that the agronomist was not a Lithuanian but a Pole, since he was a member of a Polish bank and of a Polish farmer’s union. He was brought up as a Pole at home and graduated from a Polish secondary school. He frequented a Polish library and subscribed to Polish newspapers. He sheltered Polish refugees in his farmhouse. He spoke Polish at home and moved in Polish circles³⁸.

This detailed and well-informed definition of an “active Pole” probably served as a model for many other cases of that type. Generally speaking, within the borders of “old Lithuania” Poles lost their cases in the disputes with the invaders and the Lithuanian collaborationist administration.

This is how the events taking place within the pre-war borders of Lithuania were presented in a report of the Polish Government Home Delegation prepared in October 1942. The Lithuanian administration agencies place the evicted Lithuanians on the Polish farms, while turning their Polish owners into the street. This took place mainly in the districts of Alytus, Raseiniai, Panevežys, Vilkaviškis and others. This eviction was very brutal and its consequences tragic. The evicted people were allowed to take 15 kg of luggage per head, and then they were deported either to a (transit) camp at Alytus, or if they were able to work, to Germany, where they performed forced labour³⁹.

³⁷ A. L. Arbušauskaitė, *op. cit.*, app. 17, p. 243.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 158, 159.

Shortly after the Soviet deportations of June 1941, this was another blow, that undermined the basis of social and economic existence of the Polish minority within the borders of the pre-war Lithuanian state.

Nevertheless, colonization affected also the Lithuanian population. This was especially acutely felt by those who had to move several times, which envailed a loss of property and conflicts with the previous owners of the farms. A pitiful case, for example, was that of the Lithuanian family depicted in the memoirs of Anele Kevalaitiene. This family was expelled by the Germans from the vicinity of Šipliškis in the Suwałki district and then resettled on a farm that previously belonged to Germans in the Kaunas district. When the German owner returned in 1942, they were resettled again on a farm owned by a Pole. "When we arrived", we read, "the whole family of the previous owner were still there. His wife cried, tore her hair, and her husband vituperated against us". The family returned in 1944 to its old farm, abandoned by a new German owner. "It was completely plundered, and in 1948 we had to give it up to a collective farm" she added⁴⁰.

Coming back to the events of 1942 we have to note that what aroused most apprehension among the Lithuanians was the spreading awareness of the consequences resulting for Lithuania because of being settled by the Germans. Agitation was growing. It found its expression in an open protest voiced by group of leading Lithuanian activists of the pre-war period: the ex-president Kazys Grinius and the ministers Jonas Aleksa and the priest Mykolas Krupavičius. In their letter addressed to the authorities on 9 November 1942 we could read: "The Lithuanian nation is very indignant at the news about the mass expulsions of Lithuanian and Polish peasants from their farms and houses. The Lithuanian nation cannot approve of this action. (...) The German colonization that has started bring about an economic downfall. The wave of colonization has affected the whole territory of Lithuania and the majority of Lithuanian farmers. Even those who have not been embraced by this colonization are not certain of their future (...) For these reasons we appeal for 1) putting

³⁹ Cit. from M. Wardzyńska, *Sytuacja ludności polskiej w Generalnym Komisarzacie Litwy. Czerwiec 1941–lipiec 1944 (The Situation of the Polish Population in the General Commissariat of Lithuania. June 1941–July 1944)*, Warszawa 1993, doc. 47, p. 217.

⁴⁰ Cit. from A. L. Arbušauskaitė, *op. cit.*, app. 15, pp. 283–286.

a stop to the colonization of Lithuania, 2) returning the farms to their owners, regardless of their nationality”⁴¹.

The authorities replied to this protest by repressions. The ministers Aleksa and Krupavičius were deported from Lithuania, while President Grinius, in consideration of his old age, was sent under surveillance to the provinces.

The Polish side also perceived the threat that colonization and the general German policy constituted for Lithuania. The invader’s strivings were adequately grasped in the report sent by the Polish Home Delegation to the Polish Government in London on 15 September 1942. It pointed out that the Germans wanted to prepare Lithuanians for reconciling themselves with the fact that “Lithuania, or at least its western part, together with Latvia and Estonia, was “a land steeped in German blood and sweat”. In this respect several significant moves could be observed in recent times: 1) the colonization of western Lithuania by the German element, 2) the shifting of the Lithuanian border to the East, 3) gradual shifting of the point of gravity from Kaunas to Vilnius, 4) the launching of rumours about the annexation of western Lithuania to the Reich, 5) the German press campaign putting forward the separate character of civilization in Samogitia and trying to prove that the actual centre of Lithuania is not the Teutonic town of Kauenberg but Vilnius”. The report goes on to emphasize: “In this connection the invader supports the liquidation of the Polish element in the Vilnius district, in order to be replaced by Lithuanians, who later on will be resettled in the East”.

Indeed, the latter issue became very topical in the autumn of 1942. Despite the efforts of the Resettlement Commission there was not enough land for expelled Lithuanians within the borders of “Old Lithuania”. This was mainly because the German settlers were not satisfied with regaining their old farms, and received much more that they owned before. Apart from that the invaders started to amass for the distinguished dignitaries of the Reich.

In these circumstances the authorities decided that the large group of people expelled from Lithuania would be recompensed with land in the Vilnius district where many farms remained that belonged to Poles. This is what the Government Home Delegation reported on 19 June 1942 after this action: “In the Vilnius district several thousand Poles were expelled from the Reša, Paberže and

⁴¹ Cit. from A. Bubnys, *op. cit.*, pp. 355–356.

Maišiagala districts. This action was carried out by the Lithuanian police. The Poles were driven out of their farms in an extremely brutal way, they were robbed of their property, livestock and personal effects. The expelled Poles were replaced by Lithuanian peasants who were given Polish farms free (...) No new place of settlement was assigned to the expelled Polish population. Some Poles settled in the dilapidated houses left by the Jews in nearby country towns, some remained as servants on the farms of their neighbours⁴².

It should be added that the people from Lithuania were not eager at all to come to the Vilna district. For example the document of the German authorities of 10 October 1942 said that: "Many Lithuanian peasants refused to accept farms in Eastern Lithuania, since they feared resistance or revenge of their Polish neighbours"⁴³.

Up till November 1942 a total of 16,768 German colonists were settled in Lithuania. About 3,488 farms, of an average size of 25 ha each found themselves in their hands⁴⁴.

This, however, was not the end of the colonization action. In the winter of 1942/43 main attention was focussed on resettlement in the urban centres. The best districts in the biggest Lithuanian towns: Kaunas, Šiauliai, Panevėžys and Marijampole were assigned to the German colonists. These districts were meant to be inhabited exclusively by Germans. 1,400 apartments were planned to be prepared as the first movement. The first to be proposed for eviction were most frequently Poles. According to the instructions of the Resettlement Staff in Kaunas, on 28 January 1943 an action was carried out as a result of which 360 people, that is about a hundred Polish families were evicted from their flats. However, that winter the authorities succeeded in settling in towns only one thousand Germans⁴⁵.

In the spring of 1943 the Germans tried to take a resettlement action again, also in a countryside. However, they did not succeed in developing this action on a scale similar to that of the previous year. There were several reasons. The number of the Germans from Lithuania remaining in the transit camps and qualified for

⁴² M. Wardzyńska, *op. cit.*, doc. 44, p. 210.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, doc. 73, p. 244.

⁴⁴ A. L. Arbušauskaitė, *app.* 14, p. 235.

⁴⁵ A. Bubnys, *op. cit.*, pp. 364–365.

resettlement was small. Besides, unfavourable war developments played their role as well. Following their defeat at Stalingrad, the Nazis tried to create a Lithuanian SS legion, but they failed. Resettlement was stopped for the period of mobilization. Then it was resumed, however, following further defeats on the front, the resettlement of the colonists was gradually restricted. According to the calculations of 1 January 1944 a total of 23.5 thousand German colonists had been settled in Lithuania⁴⁶.

They remained in isolation, creating as a community a sort of "state within the state". A tendency could be observed of their increasingly unfavourable attitude towards the Lithuanian self-governments. These Germans, once Lithuanian citizens, now found themselves in a new role. There were many incidents of hostility in their contacts with Lithuanian nationals for example, during statutory work for the upkeep of roads, etc., or the obligatory supply of agricultural products, exacted under the supervision of the local police. Such situations hurt the ambition of the colonists, who convinced of their superiority and strong support, accentuated by the representative of the German authorities, adopted an arrogant attitude. Although they were obliged to observe Lithuanian laws, in practice they were subject only to the jurisdiction of German invaders.

The general commissioner saw to it that the colonists should be independent. In the districts where the German agglomerations were bigger, local agencies of the Commissioners were established, which were designed to be the only representations of the German state authorities in a given district in the future. The heads of the district resettlement staff were chosen from among the resettled population⁴⁷.

The German colonists received constant support of the authorities. They received livestock and seeds free. They also received frequent subsidies. A special enterprise was called into being which purchased their products at fixed prices and supplied them with indispensable goods⁴⁸.

Care was also taken of the children's and young people's education. A higher German institute of education was opened in Kaunas, 107 elementary and 7 boarding schools were created.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 364.

⁴⁷ J. Sobczak, *op. cit.*, pp. 253–254.

⁴⁸ A. Bubnys, *op. cit.*, p. 267.

At the same time care was taken to educate these young people in the spirit of Nazi ideology. An NSDAP organization in Lithuania provided courses, lectures, film shows, musical events. All the party units (there were 30) had libraries. Moreover, a weekly called "Die Brücke" and a newspaper for peasants called "Der Bauer" were published. An active *Hitlerjugend* organization extended its protection over schools, and boarding schools and organized holiday camps for children⁴⁹.

Some German colonists claimed a right to supervise and interfere in the lives of their Lithuanian neighbours. For example Walter Hermann, resettled in the village Skirstmonys in the Raseiniai district, complained to the police that on one of the Lithuanian farms young people gathered for noisy merry-making and dancing. The Germans did not like it and tried to capture them, but the young people managed to escape⁵⁰.

This domineering attitude of the Germans, obviously, could not please their Lithuanian neighbours. The relations between the colonists and the local population were frequently not only bad, but hostile. There were two cases of murder of the Germans, however, their homes, generally, were not attacked, Nevertheless, the resettled Germans did not feel safe. They were given arms, and underwent training in self-defence. Later on, some farms, regarded as socially unsafe, were evacuated⁵¹.

To make this picture complete it is worthwhile mentioning that even among this specially selected and assorted group of colonists some people understood their role in a different way. They took care to develop correct and even friendly relations with their neighbours and to a certain extent got integrated with their surroundings. The German authorities regarded such people as unfit to fulfil the mission of colonization in the East.

On the other hand, those Lithuanian peasants who were resettled by the invaders in the Vilnius district found themselves in a such worse situation. In most cases they were moved in the years 1942/43, when the atmosphere was not yet so tense, although, even then, they met with a hostile attitude of the local population.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 367.

⁵⁰ K. Rukšenas, *op. cit.*, p. 65.

⁵¹ J. Sobczak, *op. cit.*, p. 258.

The Poles, removed from their farms, defended themselves by all possible means, feeling that their position was stronger due to the support of their community. In some cases they received permission to stay in their homes together with the newcomers. However, in such conditions life became unbearable. The documents show that "fights and quarrels were the order of the day".

The resettled people felt more and more unsafe in their new places of residence, especially because of the developing Polish resistance movement. From the beginning of 1944, in particular, the homes occupied by the new settlers were more and more frequently visited by Home Army partisans who insisted that they leave the Polish farms. In February 1944 in the Podbrzezie region a massive action took place of removing the Lithuanian settlers from the home they occupied, with some cases of beating. This event had wide repercussions in Lithuania.

On the other hand, the report of the Home Delegation of the Polish Government in London of May 1944 ran: "Under the pressure of Polish partisan detachments the Lithuanian settlers in many places left their colonies taken from Poles"⁵².

We find confirmation of this fact in Lithuanian source which say that 330 families of Lithuanian settlers, especially from the districts of Maišiagala and Paberže had to leave their places of residence. This is how a Lithuanian historian, Arunas B u b n y s, described it: "Polish partisans forced their way into the home of the resettled people, plundered them, battered the people and ordered them to leave. In February 1944 as a result of persecution by Polish partisans about 40–50 per cent of the resettled families left their farms in the Paberže district"⁵³.

It need not be added that the whole situation, in fact created by a series of Nazi resettlement action, seriously embittered the very tense Polish–Lithuanian relations in the Vilna district. Literature provides unequivocal opinions that this is what the Germans intended to achieve.

However, the Germans soon became its victims themselves. On 15 March 1944 the Resettlement Staff was closed down in Kaunas. A group of its remaining employees was still for a certain time busy packing the things of the richer colonists and sending them to the Reich.

⁵² M. Wardzyńska, *op. cit.*, doc. 95, p. 271.

⁵³ A. Bubnys, *op. cit.*, p. 357.

On a mass scale the Germans started to escape, generally on their own initiative, at the beginning of July 1944 when the front rapidly came near to the Lithuanian border following the great defeat of the German troops in Byelorussia. Bertha H. who shared in the exodus described it as follows: "At the end of June 1944 we started to evacuate ourselves quickly to Germany, which was not an easy affair, considering small children and our old parents. We travelled by two packed carts. The ride took about five weeks, since we also drove our cows to our carts"⁵⁴. The author goes on to say that since the pace of the journey was dictated by the marching abilities of the cows, the refugees, hard by the German border had nearly fallen into the Soviet hands. Eventually, they managed to reach Germany, even the Western part of it. But this was not the end of their vicissitudes. On 5 June 1945 the Americans delivered them to the Soviet authorities as former Soviet citizens. "This was the beginning of our ordeal" — Bertha H. emphasizes.

This was how the German colonists escaped. And this was the end of the age-long presence of the Germans in Lithuania. They disappeared from their social and political life of that country.

The escape in the summer of 1944 was a symbol of the failure of the Nazi plans to establish German domination in Central-Eastern Europe, created by way of attempts at colonization and building "bridges" of settlements leading eastwards.

The example of Lithuania is very instructive in his respect. Berlin treated the Lithuanian Germans instrumentally, moved them to and fro, in the hour of disaster leaving them to their fate.

On top of that, this example shows, not for the first time, the falsehood and hypocrisy of Hitler's policy. To justify the removal of Germans from the Baltic countries he formulated in his speech of 6 October 1939 a doctrine, which spoke of taking away "the chippings" of the German nation from Central-Eastern Europe in order to remove for ever the source of clashes and conflicts with the native population. And barely two years later he did something that was completely at variance with his former prot-estations. He started again to "push" the German minority eastwards, and to build with their help the resettlement "bridge".

⁵⁴ A. L. Arbušauskaitė, *op. cit.*, app. 49, p. 282.

He imposed these actions not only on the neighbouring nations but also on his own compatriots. Hitler may be acknowledged as the initiator of German resettlement during World War II who first put such project into practice. For this reason precisely he deserves to hold a prominent place in the projected Centre established in protest against the Expulsions.

(Translated by Agnieszka Kreczmar)