

The Prague Declaration, Holocaust Obfuscation and Antisemitism

Clemens Heni, Ph.D., Berlin, scholar and author, former Post-
Doc at Yale (09/2009-08/2009)

[Clemens Heni Prague Declaration
Antisemitism online](#)

Introduction*[i]*

We are facing two big antisemitic movements today: *first* the Iranian threat against Israel and the Jews in particular, Muslim or Islamic antisemitism in general. *Second* we are facing a distortion of history, especially in Eastern Europe, Europe as a whole, and America and the Western world alike: trivialization or soft-core denial of the Holocaust.

Last year I spoke at the third International Conference on Antisemitism at the University of West Bohemia in the city of Plzen, Czech Republic, about secondary antisemitism and soft-core denial of the Holocaust. I would like to continue this analysis. One of my examples was German philosopher Martin Heidegger who in 1949 compared “gas chambers” with “motorized agriculture.” I call this the universalization of the Holocaust and the denial of the unprecedented crimes of the Shoah, a “soft-core Holocaust denial” (in contrast to hard-core Neo-Nazi or Iranian, Muslim and Arab style Holocaust denial).[\[ii\]](#) Did anyone hear about the “Kaunas declaration of rewriting history by trivializing the Holocaust”? Probably not. Such a declaration does not exist. Lithuanian politicians, scholars and activists are a bit more tricky, or sophisticated. They convinced a number of people from around

the world by hosting them during nice “remembrance” events in Lithuania, by organizing symposia, conferences, declarations, working groups etc. to join them in trivializing the Holocaust by framing this process as a study of totally “equal” totalitarian regimes, or, as it has been called for short by critics, “red equals brown.”[\[iii\]](#)

The most recent attempt to distort history and to trivialize the Holocaust is the Prague Declaration. Huge efforts, particularly by Lithuanian politicians, activists and scholars and their Western friends have been made to promote this form of “secondary antisemitism”, a rejection of remembrance of the Shoah AS unprecedented crimes against humanity.

1) What is the Prague Declaration

As mentioned this declaration was adopted on June 3, 2008. The core of the declaration is the following: “Bearing in mind the dignified and democratic future of our European home,

- whereas societies that neglect the past have no future,
- whereas Europe will not be united unless it is able to reunite its history, recognize Communism and Nazism as a common legacy and bring about an honest and thorough debate on all the totalitarian crimes of the past century,”

They go on to urge the EU to establish a court to deal with “Communist crimes” like the Nuremberg Trial dealt with German crimes. Furthermore they call for a specific Europe-wide remembrance day, August 23, the day of the so called Hitler-Stalin Pact.

They call for

“establishment of 23rd August, the day of signing of the Hitler-Stalin Pact, known as the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, as a

day of remembrance of the victims of both Nazi and Communist totalitarian regimes, in the same way Europe remembers the victims of the Holocaust on January 27th.”

They further demand

“· reaching an all-European understanding that both the Nazi and Communist totalitarian regimes each to be judged by their own terrible merits to be destructive in their policies of systematically applying extreme forms of terror, suppressing all civic and human liberties, starting aggressive wars and, as an inseparable part of their ideologies, exterminating and deporting whole nations and groups of population; and that as such they should be considered to be the main disasters, which blighted the 20th century,

- recognition that many crimes committed in the name of Communism should be assessed as crimes against humanity serving as a warning for future generations, in the same way Nazi crimes were assessed by the Nuremberg Tribunal (...).“[\[iv\]](#)

This should suffice in enabling us to understand the intentions of those who wrote and signed this Prague Declaration: they are saying that the Holocaust was a crime, *but* not worse or totally different than other “crimes” of the Soviet Union or “Communist totalitarian regimes.” This is antisemitic because it trivializes the unprecedented crimes of the Shoah. I will analyze the specifics of those unprecedented crimes later.

Finally, and this is even ironic, they want to dictate to all of the European Union how to write the history of the 20th century in textbooks for pupils:

“adjustment and overhaul of European history textbooks so that children could learn and be warned about Communism and its crimes in the same way as they have been taught to assess the

Nazi crimes”.

It sounds rather like former fans of Soviet *style* want to keep on rewriting history. As if one were to say: “We know the truth and Treblinka, Buchenwald or Sobibor were as horrible as ...” as what, I ask? To what do those people compare the Holocaust? The dictatorship of Stalin? Or Brezhnev? It is in a way funny that people who (for good reasons!) detest Soviet style ideology of “truth” or “peace” themselves want to dictate by law (!) how to write textbooks. Let us finally have a look at the founding signatories:

“We, participants of the Prague Conference “European Conscience and Communism”, address **all peoples of Europe, all European political institutions including national governments, parliaments, European Parliament, European Commission, Council of Europe and other relevant international bodies [bold type in original]** or, and call on them to embrace the ideas and appeals stipulated in this Prague Declaration and to implement them in practical steps and policies.

Founding Signatories:

Václav Havel, former dissident and President of
Czechoslovakia / the Czech Republic, Czech Republic

Joachim Gauck, former Federal Commissioner for the Stasi
archives, Germany

Göran Lindblad, Vice-president of the Parliamentary Assembly
of the Council of Europe, Member of Parliament, Sweden

Vytautas Landsbergis, Member of the European Parliament,
former dissident and President of Lithuania, Lithuania

Jana Hybášková, Member of the European Parliament, Czech
Republic

Christopher Beazley, Member of the European Parliament,
United Kingdom

Tunne Kelam, Member of the European Parliament, former dissident, Estonia
Jiří Liška, Senator, Vice-chairman of the Senate, Parliament of the Czech Republic, Czech Republic
Martin Mejstřík, Senator, Parliament of the Czech Republic, Czech Republic
Jaromír Štětina, Senator, Parliament of the Czech Republic, Czech Republic
Emanuelis Zingeris, Member of Parliament, Lithuania, Chairman, International commission for the assessment of crimes of the Nazi and Soviet occupation regimes in Lithuania, Lithuania
Tseten Samdup Chhoekyapa, Representative of His Holiness the Dalai Lama, Geneva, Tibet, Switzerland
Ivonka Survilla, Exile President of Belorussia, Canada
Zianon Pazniak, Chairman of the People's National Front of Belorussia, Chairman of the Belorussian Conservative Christian Party, United States
Růžena Krásná, former political prisoner, politician, Czech Republic
Jiří Stránský, former political prisoner, writer, former PEN club chairman, Czech Republic
Václav Vaško, former political prisoner, diplomat, catholic activist, Czech Republic
Alexandr Podrabinek, former dissident and political prisoner, journalist, Russian Federation
Pavel Žáček, Director, Institute for the Study of Totalitarian Regimes, Czech Republic
Miroslav Lehký, Vice-director, Institute for the Study of Totalitarian Regimes, Czech Republic
Łukasz Kamiński, Vice-director, Institute of National Remembrance, Poland

Michael Kißener, professor of history, Johann Gutenberg University, Mainz, Germany
Eduard Stehlík, historian, Vice-director, Institute for Military History, Czech Republic
Karel Straka, historian, Institute for Military History, Czech Republic
Jan Urban, journalist, Czech Republic
Jaroslav Hutka, former dissident, songwriter, Czech Republic
Lukáš Pachta, political scientist and writer, Czech Republic

The Prague Declaration was well prepared in Lithuania and the Baltics. For example, in November 2007 the Lithuanian EU group announced meetings with high-ranking EU officials to deal with the equalization of Nazi and Soviet crimes.[\[v\]](#) In January 2008 a conference was held to go further in this direction, including MPs of the European Parliament, scholars, and activists.[\[vii\]](#) After the Prague Declaration was signed in June 2008, other resolutions and declarations have been made, too, in a seemingly endless series of steps. These include an EU Parliament resolution on “European conscience and totalitarianism”[\[viii\]](#) and a “Vilnius Declaration” of the entire OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, passed in July 2009. The latter declaration says:

“Noting that in the twentieth century European countries experienced two major totalitarian regimes, Nazi and Stalinist, which brought about genocide, violations of human rights and freedoms, war crimes and crimes against humanity.”[\[viii\]](#)

In a press release and statement by Dr. Shimon Samuels director for International Relations of the Simon Wiesenthal Center’s Paris office, related to another event at the EU OSCE early in October 2009, he states:

“Warsaw, 5 October 2009

In a Statement to the 56 member state Organization for

Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), Office of Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), Human Dimension Implementation Meeting (HDIM), the Simon Wiesenthal Centre's Chief Delegate and Director for International Relations, Dr. Shimon Samuels, exposed a new form of antisemitism emanating from East-Central Europe." [\[ix\]](#)

Samuels goes on in his analysis:

"Given the antisemitic, racist and Holocaust distortionist motives and practice associated with the Prague Declaration and related resolutions and proposals, this matter should be of urgent concern to the States Parties of the OSCE. Thus, the Wiesenthal Centre hereby urges ODIHR to note and condemn the pernicious intent of this campaign."

This Vilnius Declaration, like the Prague Declaration, exemplifies the distortion of history and the inability of today's Europe at the very least to clarify terms and expressions. There is an unbridgeable gap between the Holocaust and "violation of human rights and freedoms". Without denying for a second the violations (!) of free expression in the Soviet Union, no serious person can compare this with the industrial killing in the Holocaust, committed and organized by national socialist Germany (and not 'just' the Nazis!).

The Prague Declaration was recently called "The Prague Declaration of disgrace" by Dovid Katz, professor of Judaic studies at Vilnius University and research director at the Vilnius Yiddish Institute. Dovid Katz has established a homepage www.holocaustinthebaltics.com which provides important documents leading up to the Prague Declaration.

The anti-Jewish component of the entire enterprise become evident from a concurrent international scandal: several former Jewish partisans, who fought the Nazis/the Germans during World War II from the forests of Lithuania, have been

accused of “war crimes” against Lithuania. Katz reports:

“Then, on May 5 last year [2008, C.H.], came the low point in modern Lithuanian history. Armed plain-clothes police came looking for the women. One of them, Fania Yocheles Brantsovsky, 86 [now 87], is librarian of the Vilnius Yiddish Institute. The other, Rachel Margolis, 87 [now 88], may have been targeted because she rediscovered and published the diary of a valiant Polish Christian who had witnessed the murdering (by enthusiastic local volunteers, called “partisans” here) of tens of thousands of innocent civilians at Ponar (Paneriai), a gruesome mass murder site. Margolis, now in Israel, is unable to return to Vilnius for her annual series of lectures and walking tours of the Vilna Ghetto.” [\[x\]](#)

Imagine: Jewish resistance fighters, including Yitzhak Arad, the eminent historian and founding director of Yad Vashem [!], who escaped the ghetto and certain death to join the anti-Nazi partisan units supported by the Soviets, to fight the SS, German Nazi forces *and* their Lithuanian collaborators, are accused of “war crimes”! This is antisemitic and at least at that point, irrespective of the poor intentions of the declaration itself, people like Vaclav Havel are honor bound to reconsider their support for such anti-Jewish actions by Lithuania, because the Prague Declaration effectively backs such efforts; they are part and parcel of the “perfect equality” model. Remember: those audacious and mendacious accusations against surviving veterans of the Jewish partisans had been made *before* the Prague Declaration was pronounced!

The Prague Declaration is just the central document of an elaborate propaganda machinery of the Baltic States and their followers in the European Union and further afield. It all started in 1998 with the creation of state sponsored Commissions in the Baltics. The Lithuanian commission was established by the President of the Republic of Lithuania Valdas Adamkus and is called “International Commission for the Evaluation of the Crimes of the Nazi and Soviet Occupation

Regimes in Lithuania".[\[xi\]](#) It consists of two subcommissions, one dealing with Nazi crimes, the other with Soviet crimes. One of its members is German historian Prof. Wolfgang Benz of the Berlin Center for Research on Antisemitism (ZfA). Just as a footnote: this center had been criticized for equalizing antisemitism and so called "Islamophobia" last December at a conference in Berlin. Benz obviously has no problem with the antisemitic accusations against former Jewish partisans fighting with the help of the Soviet Union, against the Nazi occupiers of Lithuania and their local fascist collaborators, let alone the fact that Benz is not critical about the commission's endeavors to equalize Nazism and Stalinism. Moreover, Benz published an article last year of another well known historian, Jürgen Matthäus of the Washington D.C. based United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM)[\[xii\]](#) where he just lapidary (read: en passant) concisely mentions or even praises that commission (he says: "they make an effort") without asking questions about the unscholarly attempt to equalize the Holocaust with whatever crimes the Soviets committed in that region.[\[xiii\]](#)

The murkiness of the commission can be revealed inter alia by a discernable methodological pattern: by publishing sometimes accurate material dealing with the Holocaust in Lithuania in academic publications that reach very few, there is an attempt to justify or cover up the political campaign to get Europe to trivialize the Holocaust by passing "equivalence of evils" resolutions that betray more than a little of an antisemitic mood. In fact, one is left with the impression that they just deal with the Holocaust in order to be able to accuse the Soviet Union of having committed crimes on the same precise level. All historians who collaborate with the Lithuanian president, government and other involved organizations, contribute to current trends of antisemitism. They are in the best case "useful idiots." Have a look at what really happens in Lithuania; I quote Professor Katz from the Vilnius Yiddish Institute at Vilnius University:

“The commission is only one part of the state sponsored ‘Genocide Industry’ in Lithuania. The Museum of Genocide Victims (popularly ‘the Genocide Museum’), on Vilnius’s main boulevard, deals in fact only with Soviet crimes. It includes blatantly antisemitic exhibits (for example, a postwar caricature of a Soviet jeep driven by Lenin, Stalin, and ‘the Jew Yankl’, with no comment on the racism, this coming after the Holocaust). A recent exhibit on the Ukrainian famine showed a woman telling visitors: ‘In Auschwitz we were given some spinach and a little bread. War is terrible, but famine is even worse’.” [\[xiv\]](#)

Sir Martin Gilbert, one of the leading scholars on the Holocaust, therefore resigned his support for the above mentioned “Commission”:

To set the record straight, I write to confirm that I resigned, last April, from membership in the Vilnius-based “International Commission for the Evaluation of the Crimes of the Nazi and Soviet Occupation Regimes in Lithuania.” In resigning, I asked that my name be removed from all letterheading, website, brochures and other materials. I also made it clear, in my resignation letter, that I would be glad to consider rejoining the Commission at such time as Dr. Yitzhak Arad would be fully exonerated, publicly rehabilitated and honoured for his heroism in fighting Nazism.

I would like to add that this condition must now apply to all the Jewish anti-Nazi partisans whose names have appeared in press reports in this connection: in addition to Dr. Arad, these are Fania Yocheles Brantsovsky, Dr. Sara Ginaite and Dr. Rachel Margolis. They too must be fully exonerated and assured of safe travel and/or residence in Lithuania without fear of interrogation, defamation, interference or disturbance of any kind.

Fania Yocheles Brantsovsky, Dr. Sara Ginaite and Dr. Rachel Margolis are people of the utmost probity, whose experiences

in fighting Nazism, while still very young, are an inspiration to the current generation of students and young people. They should be honoured, not excoriated, by Lithuania.

Yours sincerely,

(Sir) Martin Gilbert [\[xv\]](#)

Those indefensible accusations by Lithuanian activists, politicians and police are just the tip of the iceberg in the campaign to whitewash Baltic support for the Holocaust. Shortly after the establishment of the commission, on 19th November 1998, the Jerusalem Office of the Simon Wiesenthal Center, directed by Dr. Efraim Zuroff, wrote an open letter and pleaded for a halt to the project to study Nazi crimes and Soviet "crimes" in one and the same commission. [\[xvi\]](#) Shortly beforehand, on 6 November 1998, the Association of Lithuanian Jews, a Holocaust survivor group based in Tel Aviv, wrote a similar appeal in a heartfelt letter to the president of Lithuania. Signed by the association's chairman, attorney Joseph Melamed, the letter tried to explain the Lithuanian head of state that

"the linking of the histories of the Nazi and Soviet occupations is the heart of the problem. More than any other factor, this false symmetry has been a major obstacle to any serious soul searching by Lithuanian society in regard to the extensive collaboration of Lithuanians with the Nazis in the murder of Lithuanian Jewry. Even worse, false accusations and patent exaggerations have been adduced time and again to explain, and in some cases even justify, the participation of Lithuanians in the murder of Jews during the Holocaust. [\[xvii\]](#)

Earlier, a German scholar, Matthias Messmer, wrote his Ph.D. about Soviet and post-Soviet antisemitism, including an analysis of current trends in Lithuanian antisemitism. For example he mentions the highly problematic way Lithuania deals with commemoration places, commemoration days, rehabilitation

laws or restitution of former Jewish property.[\[xviii\]](#)

It was again Dr. Zuroff who directly criticized the Prague Declaration some months ago:

“On September 23, 2008, more than 400 members of the European Parliament signed a declaration supporting the establishment of August 23 as “European Day of Remembrance for Victims of Stalinism and Nazism” and on April 2, 2009, a resolution similar to the Prague Declaration passed in the same body by a vote of 533-44 with 33 abstentions. A month ago, however, when I asked the members of the Israeli Global Forum [for Combating] Antisemitism whether anyone had heard of the Prague Declaration, not a single member responded positively.”[\[xix\]](#)

Zuroff and Professor Dov Levin, another Israeli scholar, have been struggling against Lithuanian policies towards the Holocaust for decades. In the early 1990s both were involved in conferences, and both criticized the “Symmetry of the Jewish Holocaust and the Lithuanian ‘Genocide’”.[\[xx\]](#)

2) The Holocaust in Lithuania

Vilnius or Vilna, the capital of Lithuania, was known as the “Jerusalem of Lithuania” before the Holocaust. Lithuanian Jews, called Litvaks (Yiddish *lítvakes*), had established one of the most vibrant, active and influential Jewish centers of learning in Europe in that region, especially from the eighteenth [or, depending on interpretation: the seventeenth] century and up to the Holocaust. They are world famous for Talmudic scholarship, Hebrew literature and research and, in the twentieth century, Yiddish scholarship. And, Lithuania was the country with the highest percentage of Jews killed during the Shoah, around 95% – by Germans and their Lithuanian fascist friends. Among them the Lithuanian Activist Front (LAF) was very important. The LAF was established in Germany in November 1940. An article of July 4, 1941, a few days after the German invasion of the Soviet Union, indicates clearly the

climate in Lithuania:

“The greatest enemy of Lithuania and other nations was and in some places remains a Jew (...) Today, as a result of the genius of Adolf Hitler (...) we are free from the Jewish yoke. (...) To exterminate Jewry and Communism along with it is a primary task of the New Lithuania”.[\[xxi\]](#)

Even before the Germans established their local administrations in Lithuania, local Lithuanian fascists killed large numbers of Jews in many locations. This is not the place to go into detail of the Holocaust in Lithuania. See an important article on the Shoah in Lithuania by the above mentioned Arad, including an analysis of Lithuanian mass murder of Jews *before* the Germans arrived.[\[xxii\]](#)

Since Independence three (!) Lithuanian Nazis have been prosecuted, and that only after international pressure and outcries. Not one of them was punished in the slightest.[\[xxiii\]](#)

3) The Holocaust was an unprecedented crime

In the Baltics many people, scholars and politicians use the terminology: “Holocaust of the Jews and the Holocaust of the Baltics”, referring to the fact which no one denies, that thousands of people were deported to Soviet forced labor camps after the liberation of the Baltics from German occupation. It is not just unscholarly to compare the annihilation of the entire Jewish people, based on race, including all age groups and both genders, with the expulsion of some people of that region, or even more implausibly, with the resettlement of Russians within the Baltics to make the region more Soviet. It is rather the attempt to establish “equalization” of the Holocaust with the political situation of the Baltics after the Germans left that is wholly untenable. It is intended in

part to deflect attention from the fact that very many Lithuanians, with estimates starting at ten thousand and going far higher

(not to mention killers from the other two Baltic States) were directly involved in the Holocaust, in numerous locations even before the Germans arrived, as noted above.

The trivialization of the Holocaust is typical for the Prague Declaration, too. I will explain why you cannot compare even the killing in the Gulag and other crimes of the Soviet Union with the Holocaust. Similarly, other instances of mass murder, such as those in Cambodia, Rwanda, against the Armenians in the First World War^[xxiv], or the genocide against the Roma and Sinti, are not comparable. Professor Yehuda Bauer of Hebrew University, explains: Heinrich Himmler, Reichsführer SS, declared on August 13, 1942, that not all “Gypsies” were to be killed, especially not those who had settled.^[xxv] Bauer argues against the fashionable equation of all kinds of “genocides” and the Holocaust. Rwanda was inspired by gaining power over a territory and a people, as in Cambodia, or the Spanish imperialism in the New World. Bauer calls it “pragmatically motivated genocide”.^[xxvi] First point: For the Germans during National Socialism *ideology* was the core element, he clearly points out. Germans killed the Jews because they wanted to kill them. The killing itself was the aim. This is an unprecedented crime. The second point is the global aspect of the Holocaust. Hitler and the Germans killed without any borders in Europe, and they would have killed Jews elsewhere if possible, too. And it was, third point, a total annihilation of the Jews, including all Jews with at least three Jewish grandparents. Besides those three points – ideology, global and total aspect of the destruction of the Jews there are two further aspects: Fourth, the Germans cruelly humiliated the Jews in the concentration camps (not to mention the extermination camps) even more than other victims. Jews were on the lowest level. The fifth aspect in this

analysis by Bauer is also of key importance: contrary to all (!) other revolutions in world history, revolutionaries tried to establish a new order, whether based on “class”, “religion”, political worldview etc., as in the histories of Catholicism, tsarist Russia, India and elsewhere. National Socialism, by contrast, wanted to destroy every human heritage of European and world history, including humanism, liberalism, democracy, pacifism, conservatism, and of course socialism and communism. [\[xxvii\]](#) They identified the Jews as being responsible for all these intellectual aspects of our heritage.

Current trends in research on the Holocaust and ‘genocide’ rejects any reference to the uniqueness of the Holocaust. For example, British scholar Martin Shaw accuses scholars of downplaying all other ‘genocides’ if it is still said that the Holocaust was unique. In his own word, quoting his book “What is Genocide?” from 2007:

“In the light of its comprehensive, multi-targeted nature, perhaps the Nazi Holocaust would be an appropriate modification of the term. This proposal will, however, meet strong resistance from those for whom the Holocaust’s Jewish character defines it.” [\[xxviii\]](#)

Shaw produces mainstream scholarship yet denies the unprecedented nature of the crimes of the Holocaust.

4) Antisemitism and the rewriting of history in Prague, Lithuania and the entire European Union

Shortly after 1945 every specific proposal for action against Germany (e.g. the Morgenthau plan) was turned down. Instead anti-communism and so called anti-totalitarianism became

fashionable; see the work of Hannah Arendt and others of that time. After the Cold War, in the 1990s, a big revival of those old theories emerged. The “Black Book of Communism” appeared in 1998 in France and Germany, with the intention of deleting specific commemorations of the Holocaust and replacing them by commemoration of all “genocides.”[\[xxix\]](#) This is pretty much the same as what is written in the Prague Declaration, supported not only by Lithuania and the Baltics generally, but also several politicians and scholars of Germany and the Czech Republic, like Vaclav Havel and Joachim Gauck. Germans often want to get rid of their guilt for the Holocaust. But the Czechs? The Czech Republic was among the first victims of Nazi Germany. In 1945 the Czech were liberated – by the Soviet Union’s Red Army!

Some months ago, Yehuda Bauer wrote an open letter:

“It should be remembered that the so-called “Generalplan Ost”, developed by Nazi Germany in 1941/1943, planned the annihilation “as such” – to use the terminology of the 1948 UN Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide – of the three Baltic nations, of Poles and of Czechs by forcible Germanization, expulsion and partial murder; of course, this was not known to the future potential victims. The Jews, on the other hand, were – all of them – to be annihilated, not only in Europe, but everywhere on earth (there is plenty of evidence for that). As far as the Soviets are concerned, with all their brutality, they did not plan the annihilation of ethnic or national groups as such. (...)The two regimes were both totalitarian, and yet quite different. The greater threat to all of humanity was Nazi Germany, and it was the Soviet Army that liberated Eastern Europe, was the central force that defeated Nazi Germany, and thus saved Europe and the world from the Nazi nightmare. In fact, unintentionally, the Soviets saved the Baltic nations, the Poles, the Ukrainians, the Czechs, and others, from an intended extension of Nazi genocide to these nationalities. This was not intended

to lead to total physical annihilation, as with the Jews, but to a disappearance of these groups “as such.” The EU statement, implying a straightforward parallel between Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union, therefore presents an a-historic and distorted picture.[\[xxx\]](#)

The political culture of Europe and the ideology of “genocide is genocide is genocide” on a worldwide scale, especially among “liberal” American and European scholars, tends to trivialize the Holocaust. Like Deborah Lipstadt, I call it: soft-core denial.

But we cite another term which has recently gained some currency. Dovid Katz, who describes the phenomenon of the Prague Declaration, the Commission and related aspects of equalizing Nazism and Stalinism, calls the entire effort emanating from the Baltics westward: the Holocaust Obfuscation movement:

“Holocaust Obfuscation is the systematic effort to relativize, minimize, obscure, confuse or eliminate the Holocaust, as a distinct historic entity in European history, without necessarily denying any of the documented murders.”[\[xxxii\]](#)

Efraim Zuroff usually uses the term Holocaust Distortion. These differences in terminology of the newly mounted opposition do not obscure what is the clear beginning of intellectual opposition to the phenomenon. Whether it is called Soft-Core Holocaust Denial after Lipstadt, Holocaust Obfuscation after Katz, Secondary Antisemitism after Heni, or Holocaust Distortion after Zuroff – it is one and the same phenomenon that the international scholarly, cultural, literary and activist communities have finally begun to challenge.

We have to be very clear on this point: whoever states that the Soviets committed crimes on the same level as the Nazis, is acting in an antisemitic fashion. Period. No ifs or buts or

whens. It is a grotesque, but very fashionable, anti-communist AND and, alarmingly, anti-Jewish motivated trivialization of the Holocaust. The unprecedented crimes of the Holocaust, which Yehuda Bauer very clearly analyzes, are being minimized in order to delete the worst chapter in European history in general and German guilt more particularly, and even more particularly, that of their friends in Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia, which have never matched even the German level of introspection, education, debate and pursuit over the decades of Nazi war criminals. For the many painful Soviet decades when the Baltics could not pursue their history freely, there is an excuse. But for the two decades of freedom and lavish support from the European Union, Nato and the great western powers, there is no excuse. Even less for the recent and well-financed campaign to bring on board all of Europe, to spuriously accuse Holocaust survivors who resisted, and to invest in "red-equals-brown" as national policy of "the one true history."

If Europeans – as the Prague Declaration demands – will soon describe the Holocaust in the same terms they use to describe some expulsions of Lithuanians to Russia, the six million Jews of the Shoah will be killed a second time. No one will ever remember their lives, if they will be just part of dozens of millions of murdered people in "genocides" around the world or "communism in Asia."

More specifically, scholars who allow their names to be used *now* (when all is clear!) by the websites, leaflets and PR machine of the Lithuanian government sponsored "International Commission for the Evaluation of the Crimes of the Nazi and Soviet Occupation Regimes in Lithuania" must be made aware of the fact that they are, *de facto* if unintentionally, supporting an antisemitic attempt to trivialize the Holocaust. One cannot remain silent about the political intentions of the Prague Declaration just because a commission that is underpinning it with a lot state money and not a few

antisemitic forces also publishes some small-press run accurate works on the local Holocaust to serve as a decoy to the primary purpose.

Everyone in that commission and its various committees and boards, by virtue of failing to resign, supports the general attempt to equalize Nazism and Stalinism in all of the European Union. In fact, there are no similarities. Yehuda Bauer is crystal clear about all this. He never denies Soviet crimes or their severity or the gravity with which they must be treated, and he is well aware of the fact that the Soviet Union was an antisemitic entity. But it was the Red Army which liberated Auschwitz. It was Russia which suffered most under Germany's World War Two. Without the Red Army the Czech Republic, Lithuania, the Baltics, Poland and other countries would no longer exist. Germany would have destroyed all of them. This is not to be confused with the Holocaust, which was even vastly worse, throwing the state's resources behind the actual murder of an entire population, without regard for age, gender or change of views, wherever this could be achieved on any territory. But it must not be forgotten that Nazi Germany did have the intention to destroy every political entity in the East of Europe. Without denying any of the Soviet crimes, including the aggression of August 1968, the Czech people should be grateful to the Red Army instead of supporting a perversity like the "Prague Declaration." The Red Army liberated Czechoslovakia from the Germans, and enabled it to survive as a satellite state ready for eventual independence and freedom immediately upon the collapse of the awful Soviet Union.

Yitzhak Arad wrote some years ago about Stalin and the Soviet perception of Jews, and the Soviet responses to the Holocaust. Stalin had no interest in supporting Jews (as Jews) in fighting Nazi Germany. Stalin, Molotov and others almost always rejected the mention of Jews as specific groups of victims when talking about crimes of the Wehrmacht or the

Germans in general. Stalin just mentioned Jews once, in a speech on 6 November 1941, not when dealing with the ongoing Holocaust, but rather with former Tsarist pogroms. In all other public speeches Stalin never came back to the Holocaust and the destruction of European Jews. Later in the 1940s and until his death, Stalin became a “paranoid anti-Semite.”[\[xxxii\]](#) Taking this accurate and important criticism into account, Arad ends his article with the following lines:

“However, this should not diminish the role played by Stalin and the Soviet Union as the major force that brought about the defeat and surrender of Nazi Germany, a state which had set itself the goal of annihilating the Jewish people. Germany’s defeat saved the lives of some millions of Jews.”[\[xxxiii\]](#)

Another publication of Yehuda Bauer is of interest here. In 1978 he was already aware of an ongoing process of historical distortion, of trivialization of the Holocaust by comparing it with other crimes or imagined crimes. Bauer’s piece is of tremendous importance, because he also deals with mostly good-willing/well-intentioned Americans, who always try to compare crimes. Bauer writes (again: remember this was written in 1978 and is today even more important and accurate, because Bauer actually anticipated future developments just like the Prague Declaration):

“In October 1977, when the New York Board of Education discussed a curriculum on the Holocaust to be introduced into the public education of the city, letters were written to the New York Times indicating that the Holocaust was much wider than just the murder of the Jews. It was pointed out that Poles, Lithuanians, and others were also murdered, and after the war the Soviets engaged in wholesale destruction of, for instance, the Baltic nationalities.”[\[xxxiv\]](#)

Bauer then takes a close look on the definition of “Genocide” by its inventor Raphael Lemkin. Lemkin defines Genocide:

“Genocide is effected through a synchronized attack on different aspects of life of the captive peoples (..)” and he refers to seven fields: the political field, the social field, the cultural field, the economic field, the “field of physical existence” (his term), the religious field and the field of morality.[\[xxxv\]](#) Lemkin refers to genocide even if human beings are not killed, but lost their freedom of press for example. No one can deny the crime of not allowing a free press, but people are still alive, right? Bauer comments:

“The difference between that and the Holocaust lies in the difference between forcible, even murderous, denationalization, and wholesale, total murder of every one of the members of a community.”[\[xxxvi\]](#)

The question is: why do people now need to go out of their way and become invested in the need for *equalization* of the Holocaust with other crimes to become their main point? I witnessed an angry and not entirely civil audience in the city of Plzen in the Czech Republic on 22 October 2009 when I presented a slightly shorter / earlier version of this lecture. The audience did not at all want to hear about a viewpoint that would distinguish between the dictatorship of Stalin and crimes of the Soviet Union, on the one hand, the unprecedented crimes of the Holocaust on the other. Yehuda Bauer had a similar experience – remember his quote about letters to the New York Times in 1977 who dealt with Lithuania’s “genocide”, committed by Soviets -, who is today one of the critics of the above mentioned Commissions to equalize Nazi and Soviet crimes. In his 1978 book he writes:

“To sum up, there may be no difference between Holocaust and genocide for the victim of either. But there are gradations of evil, unfortunately. The Holocaust was the policy of the total, sacral Nazi act of mass murder of all Jews they could lay hands on. Genocide was horrible enough, but it did not entail total murder if only because the subject peoples were needed as slaves. They were, indeed, ‘subhuman’ in Nazi

terminology. The Jews were not human at all. Not to see the difference between the concepts, not to realize that the Jewish situation was unique, is to mystify history.”[\[xxxvii\]](#)

This is, again, a crystal clear analysis of the uniqueness of the Holocaust. Unfortunately we see Bauer’s criticism of 1978 as much more relevant today; read: the situation has become much worse.

I would add to the above quoted and seminal work by Bauer, that even less should we deign to compare people who lost their homes, but who have never been tortured or killed, with a Shoah victim. I think scholarship has to boldly re-discuss Lemkin’s attempt at describing “genocide,” especially to avoid any “mystification” of history and the Holocaust, to use Bauers 1978 term.

It is distressing that scholars like Wolfgang Benz of the Berlin Center for Research on Antisemitism have been quiet about the antisemitic impact of the Prague Declaration while supporting the “International Commission for the Evaluation of the Crimes of the Nazi and Soviet Occupation Regimes in Lithuania”. The Commission, which has local education as one of its main official mandates, has failed with one syllable to criticize the incredible campaign of antisemitism in Lithuania in recent years that has ranged from broad-daylight Nazi marches to front page caricatures of Jews, to prosecutors ongoing defamation of the last survivors in this very country.[\[xxxviii\]](#)

There are obviously even fewer efforts to analyze the uniqueness of the Shoah as compared with the 1970s, by which time Yehuda Bauer had already exposed the mystification of history explicitly by criticizing the equalization of the Holocaust and the situation for Lithuania under Soviet rule.

If politicians, activists and scholars still join the Prague Declaration they are supporting this new and rather

fashionable form of antisemitism: rejection of remembrance of the Shoah as an unprecedented crime against an entire people.

Scholars, politicians, and intellectuals of various stripes should now move forward with all due speed to analyze academically, and to decode the antisemitism that underlies the Prague Declaration and related declarations, resolutions and actions (including the proposals for a Europe-wide Red-Brown commemoration day). Young students, or pupils, and of course every interested audience has a right of access to accurate historical information. To claim that Nazism was the same as Stalinism is a simple historical lie (and academics too must learn to use a simple clear word like "lie" when it is the right one). The Prague Declaration, the proposed Red-equals-Brown day, and all the related resolutions, declarations and commissions trivialize the Holocaust. They are therefore antisemitic.

The "Holocaust Obfuscation Movement," to quote Vilnius Professor Dovid Katz, has to be confronted with scholarly and political integrity. I am not naïve, I know that so called "anti-totalitarianism" is becoming mainstream in Europe and the US and we therefore face an uphill battle. All the more reason it is a moral imperative to wage it.

Many people of goodwill have by now been convinced by the campaign, and think the USSR was equal to Nazi Germany in its evil. It was not as evil. Moreover, without the heroic fight of the Red Army in the years 1941 to 1945, not a single Eastern European country would exist today as such. Germany would be ruling each of them as counties of its "Third Reich."

[\[i\]](#) Expanded version of a lecture given on October 22, 2009, at The 4th International Conference on Anti-Semitism. The Centre of Middle Eastern Studies, Faculty of Philosophy and Arts. University of West Bohemia in Pilsen, Czech Republic.

[ii] Shoah Remembrance and New Anti-Semitism. Derealization, Universalization, and Trivialization of the the Holocaust and Anti-Semitism, in: Věra Tydlitátová/Alena Hanzová (ed.): *Reflections on Anti-Semitism. Anti-Semitism in Historical and Anthropological Perspective*, Pilsen 2008: The Center for Middle Eastern Studies, pp. 26-34

[iii] For Dovid Katz's criticism of "red-brown" see http://www.operationlastchance.org/PDF/p_8_lith_2.pdf (10/20/2009)

[iv] <http://praguedeclaration.org/> (10/25/2009).

[v] Lithuania seeking for EU countries' official evaluation of crimes of totalitarian regimes, in: <http://www.euro.lt/en/news/lithuanias-membership-in-the-eu/news/2155/> (10/25/2009).

[vi] "The conference, "United Europe, United History" was held on January 22, 2008, and attendees included MEPs, academics and commentators. The aim of the event was to look at how the history of the continent has evolved over time. Speakers at the conference marking the establishment of the group included MEPs Tunne Kelam from Estonia, Girts Valdis Kristovskis from Latvia, former Lithuanian President Vytautas Landsbergis, Wojciech Roszkowski, from Poland, and Gyorgy Schoepflin from Hungary. UK Tory MEP Christopher Beazley, who moderated the event, said, "It is important when assessing where we are that we acknowledge where we have come from. (...) What is needed above all is an equal evaluation of the two large criminal regimes of the 20th century – nazism and communism, he said.." (<http://www.eesti.ca/?op=article&articleid=18890> (10/25/2009)).

[vii] One of the most important topics of that resolution is, like in the Prague Resolution, the plaid for a new European remembrance day: "(...) having regard to its declaration on the proclamation of 23 August as European Day of Remembrance for

Victims of Stalinism and Nazism, adopted on 23 September 2008”.

<http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?type=TA&reference=P6-TA-2009-0213&language=EN&ring=P6-RC-2009-0165> (10/25/2009).

[viii]

http://www.oscepa.org/images/stories/documents/activities/1.Annual%20Session/2009_Vilnius/Final_Vilnius_Declaration_ENG.pdf (10/25/2009).

[ix]

<http://www.wiesenthal.com/site/apps/nlnet/content2.aspx?c=lsKWLbPJLnF&b=4441467&ct=7548759> (10/25/2009). “Warsaw, 5 October 2009. In a Statement to the 56 member state Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), Office of Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), Human Dimension Implementation Meeting (HDIM), the Simon Wiesenthal Centre’s Chief Delegate and Director for International Relations, Dr Shimon Samuels, exposed a new form of antisemitism emanating from East-Central Europe.”

[x] Dovid Katz (2009): Prague’s Declaration of Disgrace, in: <http://www.thejc.com/comment/comment/prague%E2%80%99s-declaration-disgrace> (10/18/2009).

[xi] <http://www.komisija.lt/en/body.php?&m=1150456073> (10/18/2009).

[xii] <http://www.ushmm.org/research/center/intro/> (10/25/2009).

[xiii] Jürgen Matthäus (2008): Kauen (Kaunas) – Stammlager, in: Wolfgang Benz/Barbara Distel (ed.) (2009), Der Ort des Terrors. Geschichte des nationalsozialistischen Konzentrationslagers, Munich: C.H. Beck, pp. 189-208, here p. 207, nt. 54. The German reads: „Eine litauische Kommission bemüht sich unter Beteiligung ausländischer Historiker um Aufarbeitung der deutschen und sowjetischen

Besatzungsgeschichten (...).“

[xiv] Dovid Katz (2009): 'On three definitions: Genocide, Holocaust Denial, Holocaust Obfuscation' in Leonidas Donskis (ed), *A Litmus Test Case of Modernity. Examining Modern Sensibilities and the Public Domain in the Baltic States at the Turn of the Century* [= *Interdisciplinary Studies on Central and Eastern Europe* 5], Peter Lang: Bern 2009, pp 259-277, p. 265. Images cited now posted at:

<http://holocaustinthebaltics.com/ankelis.jpg> and

<http://holocaustinthebaltics.com/GenocideMuseum2008Auschwitzpanelzoom.JPG>.

[xv] I have a copy of this letter.

[xvi]

<http://holocaustinthebaltics.com/SWC%20statement%20on%20the%20Commission%20%281998%29.jpg> (10/19/2009).

[xvii] <http://www.holocaustinthebaltics.com/17143.html> (10/20/2009).

[xviii] Matthias Messmer (1997): Sowjetischer und postkommunistischer Antisemitismus. Entwicklungen in Russland, der Ukraine und Litauen. Mit einem Vorwort von Walter Laqueur, Konstanz: Hartung-Gorre, p. 454.

[xix] Efraim Zuroff (2009): A combined day of commemoration for the victims of Nazism and communism?, in Jerusalem Post, 07/12//2009

http://www.jpost.com/servlet/Satellite?cid=1246443787714&page_ame=JPost/JPArticle/ShowFull (10/19/2009).

[xx] Dov Levin (1994): New Lithuania's Old Policy Toward the Holocaust, in: Jews in Eastern Europe, Summer 1994, pp. 15-24, p. 15. See also his report about a conference in Vilnius in

October 1993: “One lecture aroused considerable controversy. This was Efraim Zuroff’s lecture, ‘The Memory of Muder and the Murder of Memory,’ which dealt in chilling detail with Lithuanian participation in the murder of Jews not only during the first days of Nazi occupation, but even before the occupiers arrived. A largely hostile audience posed many skeptical questions to the lecturer. In his remarks, Prof. Truska [now part of the Commission, see his positive remarks about the commission here <http://www.holocaustinthebaltics.com/LiudasTruska2001.pdf> , p. 23, C.H.] claimed that Zuroff was accusing the whole Lithuanian people of the murder of Jews, while, in his view, the number of those actually guilty came of 3,000, ostensibly the same number of Lithuanians who saved Jews. This was another variation on the ‘symmetry’ theme discussed above. Truska also claimed that there had never been pogroms in Lithuania, but that it was ‘hooligans’ who were responsible for ‘clashes’ with Jews” (ibid.: 23).

[xxi] Leonidas Donskis (2006): Another Word for Uncertainty: Anti-Semitism in Modern Lithuania, in: Nordeuropaforum 1/2006, pp. 7-26, here p. 19,

<http://edoc.hu-berlin.de/nordeuropaforum/2006-1/donskis-leonidas-7/PDF/donskis.pdf> (10/26(2009)).

[xxii] Yitzhak Arad (1976): The “Final Solution” in Lithuania in the Light of German Documentation, in: Yad Vashem Studies XI, Jerusalem, pp. 235-272, here pp. 239-241.

[xxiii] Geoff Vasil (2008): Analyzing Lithuanian Anti-Semitism. The ‘Double Genocide’ Theory Refuses to Quit, in: www.jewishcurrents.org/2008_nov_anti.htm (10/18/2009).

[xxiv] For an analysis of the uniqueness of the Holocaust see also: “And you could take the time, with those who wonder, sometimes in good faith, about the uniqueness of the Holocaust, you could take the time to explain that this

uniqueness has nothing to do with body count but with a whole range of characteristics that, strange as it may seem, coincide nowhere else in all the crimes human memory recalls. The industrialization of death is one such: the gas chamber. The irrationality, the absolute madness of the project, is the second: the Turks had the feeling, well founded or not, and mostly, of course, unfounded, that they were killing, in the Armenians, a fifth column that was weakening them in their war against the Russians – there was no point in killing the Jews; none of the Nazis took the trouble to claim that there was any point to it at all; and such was the irrationality, I almost said gratuitousness, of the process that when, by chance, the need to exterminate coincided with another imperative that actually did have a point, when, in the last months of the war, when all the railways had been bombed by the Allies, the Nazis could choose between letting through a train full of fresh troops for the eastern front or a trainload of Jews bound to be transformed into Polish smoke in Auschwitz, it was the second train that had priority, since nothing was more absurd or more urgent, crazier or more vital, than killing the greatest number of Jews. And the third characteristic that, finally, makes the Holocaust unique: the project of killing the Jews down to the last one, to wipe out any trace of them on this earth where they had made the mistake of being born, to proceed to an extermination that left no survivors. A Cambodian could, theoretically at least, flee Cambodia; a Tutsi could flee Rwanda, and outside Rwanda, at least ideally, would be out of range of the machetes; the Armenians who managed to escape the forces of the Young Turk government were only rarely chased all the way to Paris, Budapest, Rome, or Warsaw (...)" (Bernard-Henri Lévy (2008): *Left in Dark Times. A Stand against the New Barbarism*. Translated by Benjamin Moser, New York: Random House, p. 159)."

[\[xxv\]](#) Yehuda Bauer (2001): *Die dunkle Seite der Geschichte. Die Shoah in historischer Sicht. Interpretationen und Re-Interpretationen*, Frankfurt: Jüdischer Verlag im Suhrkamp

Verlag, p. 91.

[\[xxvi\]](#) Bauer 2001: 70-71.

[\[xxvii\]](#) Cf. Bauer 2001: 78.

[\[xxviii\]](#) Martin Shaw (2007): *What is Genocide?*, Cambridge: Polity Press, p. 42 Shaw is not referring to Yehuda Bauer's most important definitions, he cites an older piece of Bauer, and just minor parts, see *ibid.*, p. 45. Shaw is just one example of the "genocide scholarship" which trivializes the Holocaust. Scholars are also deeply wrong when they compare the massacre in Bosnia with the Holocaust: "What happened at Srebrenica had elements both of administrative mass murder and features of face-to-face killing and massacre. In this sense, it reminds us of both the Holocaust and the administrative massacres of colonial times" (Vlasta Jalušič (2007): *Post-Totalitarian Elements and Eichmann's Mentality in the Yugoslav War and Mass killing*, in: Richard H. King/Dan Stone (ed.), *Hannah Arendt and the uses of history: imperialism, nation, race, and genocide*

New York/Oxford: Berghahn Books, pp. 147-170, here p. 164. Also editor Dan Stone fails in understanding the differences between the Holocaust and Rwanda, see his article "The Holocaust and 'The Human'", in King/Stone (ed.) (2007), pp. 232-249, e.g. pp. 240-42.

[\[xxix\]](#) See for the tiny, but critical debate in Germany: Jens Mecklenburg/Wolfgang Wippermann (ed.) (1998): "Roter Holocaust"? *Kritik des Schwarzbuchs des Kommunismus*, Hamburg: Konkret Literatur Verlag.

[\[xxx\]](#) I have a copy of that letter.

[\[xxxi\]](#) Katz 2009: 272.

[\[xxxii\]](#) Yitzhak Arad (2001): *Stalin and the Soviet Leadership: Responses to the Holocaust*, in: John K. Roth/Elisabeth Maxwell

(ed.) (2001): Remembering for the Future. The Holocaust in an Age of Genocide, New York and others: Palgrave, pp. 355-370, here p. 356.

[\[xxxiii\]](#) Arad 2001: 369.

[\[xxxiv\]](#) Yehuda Bauer (1978): The Holocaust in Historical Perspective. The Samuel and Althea Stroum Lectures in Jewish Studies, Seattle: University of Washington Press, p. 31.

[\[xxxv\]](#) Raphael Lemkin (1943): Axis Rule in Occupied Europe, quoted in Bauer 1978, pp. 34-35.

[\[xxxvi\]](#) Bauer 1978: 35.

[\[xxxvii\]](#) Bauer 1978: 36.

[\[xxxviii\]](#) <http://www.holocaustinthebaltics.com/38401.html> and <http://www.holocaustinthebaltics.com/24301.html> (10/26/2009).