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Project "Giving the victims a name: the case of the Baltic States"

Final Report

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Introduction

1. Definition of the victim groups

The first step of the project was to define the victim groups, which will be included in the project.

First of all, it was decided **not to include** in the definition of victim people, who have been prosecuted by Communist authorities because they committed crimes during Nazi occupations in the Baltic States. Such decision was based on European law and national law of Baltic counties. For instance, the main law, defining victims' rights in Lithuania, the law "On the legal status of the persons who became victims of the occupations of 1939-1990"[1] states that the person can be recognized as the victim of dictatorship only in the case if she or he was not violating the fundamental human rights of other people (does not matter, if this happen during the same dictatorship, or if person was a victim in one system, for example Communism, but perpetrator in another, for example, Nazism).

According to the legislation of three Baltic States, if someone, for example, was involved in Holocaust, and later deported to Siberia by Soviet authorities (even if this happened because of other reason), this person will not be recognized and honoured as the victim of Communism. This was the main principle embodied in choosing for the victim groups.

Such victim groups were chosen from the three Baltic countries:
a) Deportees.
b) Former political prisoners, prisoners of the Gulag system.
c) Victims of war crimes, mass murders and other crimes against humanity.
d) Members of the armed resistance (if they were not involved in war crimes or crimes against humanity).
e) Members of opposition and circles of dissidents.
f) Persecuted members of Church and religious groups.
g) Members of "Samizdat" and other illegal press networks.
h) Victims of political abuse of psychiatry.
i) Victims of imprisonment, arrest and other forms of persecution (whether administrative or criminal) for political reasons.

2. Research and data collection

During the period of the scholarship, first of all, a broad research was made to find and collect data about victims of the communist system in Lithuania and other Baltic states. Several sources, containing such information, were found:

- The surveys of the Lithuanian victims, which are collected at the Genocide and Resistance Research Centre of Lithuania.

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[1] *Asmenų, nukentėjusių nuo 1939-1990 metų okupacijų, teisinio statuso įstatymas*, 1997 (30.061997), last visited on December 1, 2015,
http://www3.lrs.lt/pls/inter3/dokpaieska.showdoc_l?p_id=424850&p_query=&p_tr2=2.

- The archival sources – the research was made in Lithuanian Special Archives documents (this archive holds the former archive of documents of Lithuanian Soviet Socialist Republic KGB). Many of these documents are, also, accessible online on webpage http://www.kgbveikla.lt.
- Printed lists of victim's names and biographic data.

In the Estonian case the online source was very useful – the webpage http://okupatsioon.ee/et/memento-1996. It provides the online lists of victim names and basic biographic data. It is the website of the Kistler-Ritso EESTI (KRES) Society in Estonian, in Russian and English – virtual version of the Museum of Occupation in the period between 1940 and 1991. Lists of repressed people in Estonia contain 35165 names; they are taken online from the publication: *Politilised arreteerimised Eestis, 1940–1988*. Koide 1–2, Tallinn, 1996, 1998 (Political arrests in Estonia, 1940–1988), with links to further editions.

In the Lithuanian case a similar source was found: The continuous publication "Lietuvos gyventojų genocidas" (The Genocide of Lithuania's Residents, being published from 1998, last book 2014). Now 4 volumes, 8 books exist in general. This material, with the assistance of the Genocide and Resistance Research Centre of Lithuania, was transported to Germany, and is now available in the Berlin-Hohenschönhausen Memorial.

3. Preparation of the short biographies of the victims of Communism

The additional research was made in order to collect not only basic personal data about victims and dissidents from Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia (such as name, date of birth and mean of repression), but also to search a broader variety of historical sources. These sources provided more personal details and were very useful to prepare the limited amount of the victim biographies.

As a result, 200 biographies of most interesting cases and most famous dissidents and opponents of the communist system were prepared. It was not an easy work, because many sources are in the national languages of the three Baltic States or Russian. Therefore the data had to be not only collected, but also translated into English.

4. Creation of the victim database at the Berlin-Hohenschönhausen Memorial

As a digital space for filling in the data of the project results, a separate, new database for victims from the Baltic States was created at the Berlin-Hohenschönhausen Memorial. It was created according to the examples of the database that already exists in the Berlin-Hohenschönhausen Memorial, created for the German victims. This previous work will make it easier to create a common European database and to combine the German database with the Baltic database in future. However, some changes in the data form had to be made too.

The biggest challenge was to find the best data form: that database had to be informative enough, easy to search, and to understand. But it also had to remain scientific and adequate to reflect the most important aspects, related to the victim's experiences.

The best methodological and technical decision was found, in the form of 3 steps:
1. Research of the best examples of similar historical databases in the world's practices (for instance, the database of the Yad Vashem institute in Israel).
2. Consultation with the IT personnel from the Berlin-Hohenschönhausen Memorial.
3. Definitions with the experienced historians from Berlin-Hohenschönhausen Memorial.

The data had to be highly standardized – and this is one more issue for such kind of databases.

Finally, the best database structure and data form was decided. The database contains 6 sections for the victims' personal data plus one section for the biography. Those categories were chosen as flexible and universal as possible – because of the need to fill in every possible case of

very diverse and unequal victims and the huge variety of repressions and persecutions they had experienced.

Now these categories are:

Name	Last Name	Date of birth	Date of Death	Acitivity / Basis for repressions	Mode of persecution	Short Biography

Of course, the best technical solution had to be found in the creation of searching tool. Incremental search was chosen as the best search type here.

5. Filling in the database with the victims data

The next step when the database was finished was to fill it with the names of the victims. First of all, information found in archives, online, books and other sources had to be translated into English. Secondly, standardized ways were developed to identify:

a) Activity / Basis for repressions.
b) Forms of persecution.

The standardized symbolic language was chosen to express the type of activity/repressions and the forms of persecution. These categories are general for the whole Baltic region:

a) Religious opposition, Samizdat activities, activities in anti-Communist organization, activities in underground youth organization, activities in public protest demonstrations, Human rights activism (such activities, as for example, the membership in Lithuanian Helsinki Group), member of armed resistance (participants and supporters), members of ethno-cultural opposition and movements.

b) Political abuse of psychiatry, murder (for example, in the case of war crimes), death penalty, imprisonment, arrest, sentence (if possible and archival data exists, identifying the article according to which a person was sentenced), deportation, searches, surveillance.

Data about 200 victims was filled in into the database according to above mentioned standard: identifying the name, last name, dates of birth and death, oppositional activity, basis of repression, mode of persecution, attaching the short biography.

6. Public presentation of the project's results

Due to the scope of the project, two public events were organized to present the project's results. The idea of them was to present the project's results to interested scholars, historical memory field specialists and general public from Germany and Baltic Countries.

The first event took place on 23rd of October, 2015, in Vilnius University, Vilnius, Lithuania. It caused the great interest among local scholars, specialists from museums and students.

The second event took place on 12th of November, 2015, in the Estonian Embassy in Berlin. There gathered both: German and Estonian personnel, working in the field of historical memory and studies of communism.

Monika Kareniauskaitė organized the places for the event, defined the event schedules and program, and prepared her speeches and power point presentations. While the technical assistance, event preparation and translation was provided by the Berlin-Hohenschönhausen Memorial and Vilnius University.

Unfortunately, the attempts to cover Latvia as well, and organize the event in Latvia's embassy in Berlin (it was the initial project's idea) were not successful due to administrative

reasons and lack of material resources. But at the moment Monika Kareniauskaitė is trying to organize the event in Latvia's embassy next year.

7. The management of the project "Giving the victims a name"

One of the project and scholarship tasks was to strengthen international relations and connection between the Berlin-Hohenschönhausen Memorial and other institutions, dealing with the Communist past, in other European countries. Due to this task, attempts to develop a common project on the European level were made.

With the assistance of Dr. Hubertus Knabe and Ms. Melanie Dore, the project proposal for the programme "Horizon 2020" was written – in order to create an international database of the victims of communism from all over Europe. The Memorial succeeded to win the leading institutions in coming to terms with the communist past in ten European countries for cooperating in the project: such as Institute of National Remembrance (Instytut Pamięci Narodowejč IPN, Poland), Institute of Contemporary History of the Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic (Historický ústav Akademie věd České republiky, USD), Institute for the Investigation of Communist Crimes and the Memory of the Romanian Exile (IICCMER), Nation's Memory Institute (Ústav pamäti národa, UPN, Slovakia), Study Centre for National Reconciliation (Študijski center za narodno spravo, SCNR, Slovenia).

The preparatory work for the project and coordination was mostly made by Monika Kareniauskaite. There were also companies involved responsible for the technical assistance and meetings organizede with them (Fraunhofer-Gesellschaft, FG; Musterfabrik Berlin, MF; SEC Consult, SEC).

8. Other tasks in Berlin-Hohenschönhausen Memorial

The scholarship holder also had an opportunity to learn more aspects of the work of memorial, as the institution, dedicated to represent the historical memory, and to help its employees in the everyday practices.

For instance, she wrote several texts to public relation department (biographies of communist victims from GDR), helped to organize public events, became familiar with the working of museum, objects database, exposition creation process, the way how the memorial is dealing with oral history and taking interviews from former victims and prisoners (oral history methodology). These skills will be very helpful for scholarship holder's future career.

9. Impact and results

1) The impact for the scholarship holder

The scholarship and period, spent in the Berlin Hohenschönhausen memorial, had a very positive impact on skills, competences and future career of the scholarship holder, which can be measured by several aspects.

Historical knowledge. First of all, M. Kareniauskaitė was able to broaden her historical knowledge and understanding of the Communist dictatorship and its working mechanism in the German Democratic Republic. Her knowledge about the communist dictatorships in the Baltic Countries was contextualized and put in the broader international discourse of the studies of Communism. Such new knowledge will be crucial for her further career as a scholar and researcher of Communist dictatorships – as well in the field of practical work in historical memory of communism (after the scholarship, Monika Kareniauskaitė is going to continue her dissertation about Communist legal system in Vilnius University and come back to work as the senior specialist

of historical research programmes in the Genocide and Resistance Research Centre of Lithuania). This knowledge will be also very useful in academic work with students.

Skills and experience in the field of "Memory Work". The scholarship was a perfect opportunity to understand the current debates and dominating discourses in the representation of Communist past in Germany. M. Kareniauskaitė had learned, what main narratives exist in the field, what are the dominating politics of memory, what are the debates in the field. As a result, M. Kareniauskaitė had developed critical understanding about the strategies of memory politics and activities of actors in his field. It will be very helpful in the future work in national (Lithuanian), regional (Baltic, Polish, etc.) and cross-European projects, related to the remembrance of the Communism.

Monika Kareniauskaitė had developed the understanding, what are the best methods to understand and represent the communist past in the fields of museums, memorial and education sectors. She also learned the ways of building the strategies of presenting the historical memory of communism in both: national and European levels.

Technical and other skills. The project was very useful for development of various skills. First of all, creation of the database was a great opportunity to get theoretical framework and technical skills in the field of digital humanities. M. Kareniauskaitė improved her skills on working with databases and other computer-based skills. Secondly, the project was useful for administrative skills and skills of project management. And, finally, M. Kareniauskaitė was able to improve her German language knowledge, because of everyday communication in the office and work on project's tasks.

Cultural exchange. The exchange of methods and interpretations while working in the field of historical memory in Germany and Lithuania was very intensive and a good way to understand the European level debates on historical memory, concerning the communist past – not avoiding the ethically very difficult topics, such as the dealing with perpetrators, definition of victims, claims for damage and other politically, economically and morally difficult issues.

Cross-institutional communication. As mentioned above, the big network, consisting of various institutions of European Union, dealing with the communist past, was developed in the course of the project.

Contacts. Monika Kareniauskaitė was also able to broaden her international network of contacts and professional relationships in the fields of historical studies and historical memory of Communism, especially with experts of the field from Germany – which will be very useful in future projects and scholarship holder's career.

2) *The impact for the institution*

The exchange programme also had a positive result to the Berlin Hohenschönhausen memorial, as an institution, dealing with the communist past.

Shaping the form of the database for developing future projects. The data basis structure and idea, developed during the period of scholarship by Monika Kareniauskaitė, increased the understanding, how the common database of European victims in future will look like. Now the experience of much broader region is taken into consideration, while developing the European database project (which itself unfortunately still lack funding): it covers Germany, Baltic region and Hungary.

Collecting victim data. The data about victims from the Baltic States, collected in the scope of the project, are now archived in Berlin Hohenschönhausen memorial and will be used for various future research projects and for the European Victim Database.

Cultural exchange. The employees of the Berlin Hohenschönhausen memorial also became enriched due to the inter-cultural communication with the scholarship holder. Monika Kareniauskaitė became highly integrated into the work of the memorial. Therefore, due to everyday

communication for administrative reasons and common research activities, the development of common discourse and interpretations of process of post-communist transformations became possible. Of course, Baltic and German historical memory towards the Communism and methods of dealing with the Communist heritage still differs. But such exchange was a good opportunity for dialog and better understanding of each other – not in the political level, but in the level of everyday "memory work" practises.

       Cross-institutional communication. The Berlin Hohenschönhausen memorial also expanded its institutional network of communication and now will be in the close contact with Genocide and Resistance Research Centre of Lithuania and Vilnius University. For example, on 10-12th of January, 2016, a visit of the administrative head of historical research department and public relation specialist from the Genocide and Resistance Research Centre of Lithuania to the Berlin Hohenschönhausen memorial is planned.