Many international ties have in recent years been established between Norway and Lithuania, through for instance business, migrant workers and various international programs. It is however a little known fact that there also were ties between these two countries during the Second World War. Some years ago, while reading a book about soviet prisoners of war, I came across a piece of information that sparked my interest. In the spring of 1945, a Lithuanian diplomat named Vladas Žilinskas was said to have contacted the Norwegian embassy in Stockholm claiming that about one thousand of his countrymen were being held as prisoners by the German occupants in Norway. He was concerned about what would happen to them after the war and emphasized that the vast majority of them were forced labourers working for Organisation Todt. I decided to investigate this information, and it turns out that Mr. Žilinskas was largely right in his claims.

After the German defeat in World War 2 on 8. May 1945, allied forces started to arrive in Norway to disarm the German soldiers and organize their surrender. These forces were modest in numbers in the beginning, counting only about 30 000 troops in total, and faced the huge task of demobilizing a military force of over 300 000. In addition, they would have to organize the liberation of over 100 000 prisoners of war and forced labourers held in camps throughout Norway. This large concentration of prisoners came as a bit of a surprise to the allies. While planning the operation in Norway they had information that many people were held in captivity in the country, but it soon became clear that the actual number of prisoners far exceeded what anyone had expected to find. The allies were particularly surprised at the large numbers of Russians and Eastern Europeans among the prisoners, and at the fact that there were large numbers of foreigners serving either in or under the Wehrmacht. The latter group is said to have counted over 37 000 people, belonging to no less than 40 different nationalities. Among them, it turns out there were a number of Lithuanians.

So far, I have found 843 people that were considered to be of Lithuanian nationality by the allied authorities in 1945. These included people from the Memel region, which was annexed by Lithuania in 1923. People living in this region were considered Lithuanian citizens until Germany reclaimed the area.
in 1939⁴, and were eventually also treated as Lithuanian citizens by allied authorities if they claimed to be of Lithuanian nationality. The total number of Lithuanians that were sent to Norway during the years of war is most likely somewhat higher, but based on the sources I have examined so far it has only been possible to identify these 843.

Why were the Lithuanians in Norway?

Hitler had personally decided that Germany had to occupy Norway, and his plans for this territory were both complex and extended far into the future. He envisioned large-scale German investments in permanent facilities within a number of sectors, all of which would be of future use for the German empire. Norwegian waterfalls were to be harnessed and deliver inexpensive electricity to German industry. Electrochemical industry were to be established to deliver large quantities of aluminium to the Luftwaffe⁵. Several large airfields were to be constructed, and the railway system was to be extended all the way to the soviet border. Autobahns were also planned, linking Trondheim and Oslo⁶, and a number of naval installations were planned along the coast. Trondheim was intended as an important support point for the navy, with a dry dock capable of servicing even the largest ships, and the erection of a separate city devoted to catering for the needs of the sailors⁷. All of this was intended to make Norway an integrated part of „The New Europe“, and was part of Germany’s preparations for the post war years when it would have to consolidate its dominance⁸.

There were in other words no lack of German ambitions in occupied Norway. It would however turn out that they once again were undertaking great aims with limited means⁹. The first obstacle encountered was shortage of workers. Even though the Germans offered good salaries by Norwegian standards, it soon became clear that their many construction projects would take a long time to complete if they were to rely solely on the Norwegian work force. The situation could be helped by bringing workers from Germany, but one would still be nowhere near meeting the deadlines determined for the many projects. In this situation, a decision was made to send prisoners of war and forced labourers from other occupied territories to Norway. Such workers could be found in abundance after the German offensive against the Soviet Union in 1941, and the supply of them was steady as long as Germany was successful on the Eastern Front. The access to prisoners of war would however be greatly reduced towards the end of the war as Germany gradually moved towards defeat¹⁰. In this stage the German activity in Norway also somewhat changed character. The larger long-term projects were no longer as relevant, and such things as fish exports and the construction of defences against possible allied invasion became more important¹¹. Work on the larger projects did however continue throughout the war, and unfree workers were still being transported to Norway up until the final stages of the war.

How did the Lithuanians come under German command?

Although the majority of unfree workers in Norway were prisoners of war from the Red Army, it is unlikely that this was the case for any of the Lithuanians. Only a very limited number of Lithuanians ever served in the Red army, most of those who did avoided capture, and the majority of those that were taken prisoner were released shortly afterwards. That and the fact that mortality rates for soviet prisoners of war were staggering
makes it highly unlikely that any possible Lithuanian could have found his way to Norway as a soviet prisoner of war and survive until 1945. My study also gives no indication that this ever happened.

Most of the Lithuanians in Norway were either workers or soldiers, with ethnical Lithuanians dominating in the first category and Memellanders dominating the second. The majority of the Memellanders were enlisted as ordinary personnel in the German armed forces. German laws of conscription also applied to Germans living in the occupied areas, so there was no reason why also Germans in the Memel area could not be drafted after 1939. Their status as soldiers would have given the Memellanders freer conditions in Norway than what would have been the case for other Lithuanians, most of whom were serving as unfree workers in Organisation Todt. This assumption is supported by the fact that a number of Memelanders married Norwegian women during their stay in Norway, while no such marriages are recorded for the other Lithuanians. Some Memellanders claim to have been enlisted in the German forces by force and under threat of execution, and that they were cut off from possessing any higher military rank unless they were members of the Nazi party. Most of them were however regular German forces, and were recruited into German service in different ways than the other Lithuanian citizens.

The majority of the Lithuanians served in Organisation Todt, and were most likely recruited by force. This is at least commonly claimed when they were being questioned by allied authorities. There are some cases of individuals that seem to have volunteered, but these are clearly exceptions. A large number of Lithuanians claimed to have been organised in so called „Bau Battalione“, which mostly performed construction work for the German forces. Only one of these battalions is mentioned in existing literature, but the high number of Lithuanian civilians in Norway suggests that there might have been more than one. The battalion that is mentioned remains unidentified, but is said to have counted around 160 workers. The Germans established a number of such units in Lithuania and dispatched them to various areas under their control. The personnel serving in them could be both volunteers and people recruited against their will, but the officers were usually Lithuanian volunteers from the ranks of the Defence battalions. Workers enlisted in Organisation Todt were usually not organised into military units, but were considered as labour units performing tasks for the Wehrmacht. As many as 15 000 Lithuanians are said to have been under command of Organisation Todt in the final stages of the war, and most of them were stationed in Western Europe.

Several Lithuanian citizens found in Norway after the war were dressed in uniforms from the Luftwaffe. The Germans formed several support units for the Luftwaffe in Lithuania during the war, mostly for anti-aircraft and construction purposes. The biggest effort to provide personnel for the Luftwaffe came in the summer of 1944, when many Luftwaffe troops serving in the rear lines were sent to the front. These people had to be replaced, and as a consequence several thousand Lithuanians and people of other nationalities were called in as ground personnel for the air fields. Some of them seem to have been sent to Norway; since several Lithuanians here claimed to be both anti-aircraft personnel and that they had arrived in the country in 1944. Furthermore, a Lithuanian unit serving under the Luftwaffe is known to have participated in building an airfield at Haslemoen, and there are even some claims that the remains of a Lithuanian defence battalion the Germans disbanded by force was sent to Norway to build an airfield. Whether this is the same unit or not remains undetermined, but it is a possibility.
Sources of information about this group

Many of the written sources regarding non-Germans in Norway during WW2 are lost, much due to the fact that German troops burned or in other ways destroyed many documents prior to capitulating\textsuperscript{22}. It is also a fact that large numbers of foreign citizens were evacuated in a short period of time by a very limited number of troops, leaving little time for paperwork. Sources of information about these people are consequently scarce in Norwegian archives, although some traces can still be found. The most easily accessible source is the database over persons repatriated to soviet territory in 1945, which shows that at least 160 Lithuanians chose this option after voluntary repatriation became possible in 1945\textsuperscript{23}. The rest of them remained in the country for some time, and from this period we have a bit of information. Primarily from various registration cards that they filled out while being held in internment camps. Most of these cards remain intact and are kept in the Norwegian national archives, along with various correspondence relating to everyday life in the camps and documentation regarding the final extradition of the Lithuanians to Germany. From these documents, it has been possible to gather basic information about all Lithuanians that are registered as present in Norway in 1945, such as for instance names, place- and date of birth, profession, tasks performed in Norway, marital status and desired destination. In sum, this material offers a bit of insight into who these people were and how they found their way to Norway.

So who were they?

The majority of them were unmarried men between 21 and 30 years, although people as young as 16 or as old as 55 could be found. They seem to have arrived in Norway for various reasons and at different stages in the war. Among them were both individuals that claim to have been in the country for a long time, and others that arrived quite recently. Many claim to have been recruited by force just prior to the soviet reoccupation of Lithuania in 1944. Their occupational backgrounds and the differences in age also seem to suggest that they arrived in many smaller groups, rather than as a result of one large recruitment campaign. The group contains people of all professions, from judges and doctors to monks and brewers. No professions or social groups seem to be over or under represented, with the exception of a large concentration of locksmiths. Only a handful of persons with military careers could be found, and the majority of them were from the Memel area. The most dominant group was farmers and farm workers. With the exception of a few women married to Memellanders and one infant, no women or children were found. This leads to the conclusion that the Germans neither used Lithuanian women and children as forced labour in Norway, nor deported entire families from Lithuania. Even though such actions were taken in other occupied eastern territories.

The most interesting thing about this group is perhaps not their backgrounds, but rather the fact that so many of them were opposed to going home. Less than half of them wanted to be repatriated, and the majority stated that they would like to resettle in North America. Other desired destinations are hardly even mentioned, with a small exception for a minority of less than 10% who wanted to resettle in Germany. This opposition against going back was at the time commonly interpreted as related to fear. Norwegian authorities believed that the Lithuanians feared reprisals and life under communist rule in general, and soviet officials in turn believed that the Lithuanians had good reason for such fear. It was at least common for soviet officials to refer to those not wanting to
return as “war criminals” or similar. If that was really the case, connection to the Wehrmacht should be the single most determining factor for whether or not a person wanted to return. An examination of the group resisting repatriation shows however that this was not the case. Age and family commitments are the most determining factors. Young men between 21 and 30 were most likely to seek emigration, while the younger and older men preferred repatriation. Regardless of whether they were connected to the Wehrmacht or not. Whether they were married or not was also of less importance, and in some age groups there were even more married men among the emigrants than there were single men. People with children in Lithuania on the other hand largely chose to go back. These circumstances strongly suggest that fear of going back was not the only reason for resisting repatriation. Pessimism and the chances of a better life must also have motivated many to seek emigration as an alternative.

Allegations of war crimes

In several modern works dealing with prisoners of war in Norway, one can find information based on eyewitness accounts that claim Lithuanians were overrepresented among the guards in the POW camps in Norway. An attentive reader of this field of history can easily put this information in connection with the strong opposition among many Lithuanians to return home after the war. The conditions in these camps were horrible and guards quite often made themselves guilty of what must be characterised as war crimes. The victims of these crimes were mostly Russians, and they were the new rulers in Lithuania after the war. A resentment among any possible Lithuanians responsible for war crimes would under such circumstances be understandable. I have on the other hand not been able to find any indication in the sources I have used that such actions took place. None of the documents I have examined give any mention of Lithuanians serving as guards in the Norwegian camps for soviet prisoners of war. That does of course not eliminate the possibility that some of them had such functions, but it suggests that this happened to a far lesser extent than what has previously been assumed. We must also take into account that the two main groups regarded as Lithuanian citizens in Norway, Memellanders and ethnic Lithuanians, did not have equal opportunities to be assigned tasks such as guard duty in POW camps. Such service requires the personnel to be armed, and with few exceptions it was only the Memellanders that served as military personnel. The rest were organised as workers, and in relatively peaceful territories such as Norway it was not common for the Germans to equip their workers with weapons. These workers did on the other hand quite often work side by side with soviet POW’s, and it cannot be ruled out that some of them performed guard duties on the work sites. It is also known from other occupied areas that Lithuanian units sometimes were equipped with arms, but with the exception of the Memellanders serving in the Wehrmacht I have found no mention of this in Norway. At the very least, this should lead to the conclusion that allegations of Lithuanians participating in war crimes in Norway are exaggerated. If such things were common, there would most likely have been specific accusations of such in the correspondence between Norwegian authorities and the soviet repatriation authorities. Such is not to be found, but there is on the other hand no shortage of general accusations from the soviets.

Disputes over repatriation

Representatives from soviet repatriation commission under the leadership of General P. F. Ratov arrived in Norway on May 31st 1945. The 52 year old Ratov had previously
led the Soviet military commission in Britain, and during his stay there gained a reputation as being arrogant, controversial and difficult to deal with\textsuperscript{26}. In many ways he also lived up to this reputation while staying in Norway. Here, he and his commission were to work together with the British brigadier General R. Firebrace, who acted as liaison officer between the Soviet military and the British ministry of defence. Together they were to lead a commission that was to determine whether prisoners of war and other displaced persons in Norway were to be considered Soviet citizens or not\textsuperscript{27}. In cases where they disagreed, Firebrace would have the final word\textsuperscript{28}. Such disagreements were common in Norway, and the disputes over who were to be considered Soviet or not turned out to be the most difficult part of the repatriation process from Norway\textsuperscript{29}.

The Soviet part of the commission were under great pressure to ensure that all persons claimed by the Soviet Union were returned home\textsuperscript{30}, and from the start they took a very aggressive attitude towards their Western counterparts\textsuperscript{31}. The Soviet Union considered everyone originating from east of the so-called Curzon-line as Soviet citizens\textsuperscript{32}, which in reality meant extending this definition to anyone whose homes were within the current borders of the Soviet Union. The Western allies had on the other hand only recognized the Soviet borders of 1939\textsuperscript{33}, and consequently had a more limited view on who were to be considered Soviet citizens. These differences left room for disputes when it came to nationalities such as Lithuanians.

There were even cases of Soviet representatives abducting people they wanted, but were unlikely to get their hands on through legal means. One of these abductions happened on July 6\textsuperscript{th} 1945, when a man from the Vilnius area was dragged from the street and into a car by liberated Soviet POWs\textsuperscript{34}. He was taken to a camp for Soviet nationals, and was never heard from again. Two days later, a train with 800 people left this camp bound for the Soviet Union and it is believed that the kidnapped Lithuanian was among them\textsuperscript{35}.

By July 26\textsuperscript{th} 1945, all those who wanted to return to the Soviet Union had been repatriated from Norway. The only ones left were people from the disputed areas, including Lithuanians\textsuperscript{36}. Soviet representatives continued to demand their extradition, but were unable to take matters into their own hands since they only had limited access to the camps where these people were kept. Ratov protested against this situation in Soviet press, claiming that the Western allies were holding back Soviet citizens under the false pretence that their citizenship was undetermined\textsuperscript{37}. He characterized this as an illegal action and accused Western authorities of keeping Soviet citizens isolated from the members of his commission and filling their heads with propaganda\textsuperscript{38}. This criticism has been portrayed as largely incorrect and unreasonable by Norwegian historians, but with regards to propaganda he did have a point. There are evidence of such activities going on in the camps, but Ratov and his men on the other hand also participated in this. During the phase when they still had access to the camps, they would convey messages such as “you have carried the heaviest burdens of the war”\textsuperscript{39}, “you have nothing to fear”\textsuperscript{40} and “mountains of gold await you”\textsuperscript{41} to the inmates. Words that the Soviet representatives must have known were less than true, but still they managed to convince a number of people to return voluntarily. With access to the camps now being limited, such opportunities for persuasion were greatly reduced. Still they managed to get their hands on more people. On July 27\textsuperscript{th}, a Soviet major accompanied by two Lithuanians gained illegal access to the Ranum internment camp and left with seven inmates of Baltic origin\textsuperscript{42}. Although this incident is characterized as a case of persuasion rather than an abduction, it was still
not according to the rules. When Ratov later was confronted with this fact, he described the Balts as being Lithuanians and „burning with desire to return to their homeland”⁴³. He further criticised the camp administrators for attempting with all possible means to rob his countrymen of the opportunity to return home to their families⁴⁴.

It was also common for the soviet representatives to make incorrect claims when demanding inmates extradited from the camps. One example is from August 20th 1945, when Ratov himself in a letter claims that there are two soviet citizens being held in the Bergan internment camp. They were allegedly imprisoned in a dark and damp basement because of their burning desire to return to the Soviet Union⁴⁵. Upon questioning, it turned out that these men were from the Vilnius area and that they had no desire to go back. Such incorrect claims and accusations of western propaganda continued until the repatriation commissions left Norway in December 1945.

By then most of the Lithuanians that resisted repatriation had already been transported to the British and American occupation zones in Germany⁴⁶. The official reason for this move was that it happened because of administrative concerns, but the real reason was that the western allies were worried that Norwegian authorities would succumb to soviet pressure when they pulled out of the country⁴⁷. After they left, Norwegian authorities themselves were left responsible for any foreign nationals left in the country. The only ones that stayed were therefore a smaller group of 1346 so called „unrepatriable” people, consisting mostly of polish citizens⁴⁸. The Soviet Union was no longer demanding the extradition of Poles, since the new Polish government at this stage had sent their own representatives to Norway⁴⁹. There were however still some Lithuanians left in the country, and the Soviet Union had in no way given up their attempts to get these people back. Now they tried a new tactic. A number of Norwegian citizens had fallen into soviet captivity while serving in the German SS, and a handful of them had survived the war. In 1947 soviet officials suggested to exchange nine of them against five Lithuanians still detained in Norway, claiming that these had to be considered soviet citizens⁵⁰. They emphasised that the Norwegian prisoners would not be handed over unless Norway complied and handed over the Lithuanians⁵¹. The Norwegian department of justice considered the matter, but an exchange never took place. The Norwegians remained in soviet captivity, and the Lithuanians remained in Norway. What later became of them is unclear.

**Conclusion**

We do not know much about what happened to the Lithuanians that were transported out of Norway either. Traces of them in Norwegian sources end at the point where they leave the country and information about their further fates can only be pursued in foreign archives. They do however fall into two categories – those who were sent to the Soviet Union and those who went to the DP camps in Germany. People belonging to the first category have been left little hope by Norwegian researchers. Up until recently, is was a common misconception that the majority of them were executed more or less upon arrival⁵². Others have claimed that they were all either killed or deported to camps in Siberia⁵³. More recent studies have on the other hand suggested that such scenarios were unlikely⁵⁴. Stalin’s orders nr. 270 and nr. 227, which allowed such executions, were repealed by the Supreme Soviet of the Soviet Union on June 7th 1945, and a general amnesty was given for a variety of actions previously considered as crimes during the war. This amnesty included prisoners of war with
lower military rank and personnel serving as German police troops, with the exception of personnel belonging to the Vlasov army. The Russian historian Victor N. Zemskov has done research into the fate of people repatriated to the Soviet Union from western territories after the war, and claims that as many as 58% simply were sent home. He does however not give any estimated number of how many people that were executed, despite the fact that there are known accounts of such executions taking place. It anyhow seems likely that a considerable number of the at least 160 Lithuanians that were repatriated to the Soviet Union eventually found their way back to Lithuania.

With the exception of the handful of people who seem to have been allowed to settle in Norway, the remaining Lithuanians were sent to areas controlled by the western allies in Germany. What happened to them there I have not yet been able to determine. We know that the majority of them wanted to resettle in North-America, but whether this was granted or not is unclear. Some authors claim that a large number of people from Lithuania remained in West Germany as stateless refugees, but it is uncertain how many of these found their way there from Norway.

Further information about what happened to this diverse group of Lithuanians can probably be found in both German, Lithuanian and Russian archives. The most interesting source of information can however not be found in any one location. That is the eye witness accounts of the actual people, what they saw and experienced during and after the war. Some relatives of Lithuanians that were in Norway during the war have already contacted me after my study was published in Norway, and the stories they have to tell are fascinating. I hope to hear more such stories in the future.

Nuorodos

7. Ibid., p. 88.
19. Ibid., p. 250.

Gaidis, p. 251.

21 Soleim. “Slavene fra Øst”, p. 32.


24 Hauge, p. 145.


26 Steffenak. “Repatrieringen av de Sovjetiske Krigsfangene”, p. 147.


29 Ulateig, p. 86.


34 Ulateig, p. 130.


36 Ibid.


39 Sødal, p. 69.

40 Ulateig, p. 90.


45 Thorne, p. 53.


47 Thorne, p. 53.


50 Abraham, p. 179.

51 Ibid., p. 177.


Vokietijos piliečiai Norvegijoje antrojo pasaulinio karos metais: kas jie tokie ir kas jiems nutiko?