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MEMORANDUM ON JONAS NOREIKA (GENERAL STORM) ACTIVITY IN ANTI-NAZI UNDERGROUND

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In Jezuit parish archive of Lithuania and Latvia unknown in historiography testimonies of priest Jonas Borevicius were found which disclose that Jonas Noreika being Head of Siauliai district during the nazi occupation was in same time leading the Zemaitija anti-nazi resistance and organized network of Jew savoir in Siauliai. These testimonies priest Borevicius submitted on oath in USA Illinois Northern district Eastern sector court in Chicago, in case USA v Antanas Virkutis (LJPA, F4, ap.1, b9).

By initiation of National Vilnius Gaon Jewish museum, for saving of Jews priest Jonas Borevicius is awarded with Life saving cross (y. 2017), a memorial plaque is made for him in Siauliai.

During questioning in Chicago court when asked, does he knows “about underground movement that took place in Lithuania during nazi occupation”, priest Jonas Borevicius answered: “That was active underground. And one day leader of underground met me “.“What was his name? “Jonas Noreika [Noreika]”.“Was he leading in whole Lithuania?” “No. Only in western Lithuania”. “Siauliai district?” “Western Lithuania, more than Siauliai district”. “What was the purpose of underground?” “ When he asked me to participate in that [underground] work, I told him, that I am catholic priest and I am accepting only the charity activity, not political or military. He says he agrees with it. And requested to gather small group of priests, which would directly assist Jews in Siauliai ghetto.

Priest J. Borevicius, probably thought by J.Noreika, organized Jew rescue group according to anti-nazi resistance organization Lithuanian Front strict conspiracy rule to make underground groups only from 3 persons. Priest J. Borevicius, have chosen other two priests not only after their reliability, but also after their places of residence, suitable to lead out Jews from the town. Siauliai Jew ghetto was not far from church of St. Peter and Paul, therefore priest of this church Petras Dzegoraitis was leading out Jews through the hole in ghetto fence and brought them to St. Ignaco Lojola church in town center, where priest J. Borevicius was having service. Having rested for few hours in Jezuit residence, approximately on 2-3 am. at night Jews were leaving for Kuziai, which were 12 km away from Siauliai, where they stayed in shelter of Kuziai priest Adolfas Kleiba. Sometimes 15-20 Jew families were hidden in there, until priest A.Kleiba would be successful to find the accepting farmers.

When asked, whether any other priests were taking part in this rescue group, priest. J.Borevicius said: “In underground only three work. Three and three and three... Because if you are caught and tortured and if you lose cold-bloodiness, strength, then you are able to tell only about other two. Every group has its mission in underground. Administration indicates what to do and that is it. If bigger group of persons knows about it, then it would be hard to maintain the secret, and there would be gross danger to our hard but satisfactory mission of helping the poor men. Nazis could have devastated father Zigoraitis and father Kleibas and me. “

To question whether you received support from other residents of Siauliai when saving Jews, priest J.Borevicius told: There were few of my friends, doctors. Under my request one doctor in Siauliai has put one Jew kid as an assistant in hospital”. [Priest J.Borevicius tells about G.Periene son who escaped Kaunas ghetto, which was sent by priest J.Borevicius to Sofija Jasaitiene, and she sheltered him in hospital through her friend Janina Luiniene. This story of G.Periene was described in book released during soviet times (y. 1967) “Fighters even without weapon” and this book during the trial was given by priest J.Borevicius as evidence about his participation in saving Jews of Siauliai].

When asked whether someone retold him about political activity of underground in Siauliai, priest J.Borevicius told “I haven’t asked anyone, as no one would tell me. That was very strict secret. Underground-very strict secret”. Priest J.Borevicius indicated an incident, showing what is the end when conspiracy is not maintained: “Friend of father Poschela was drafting a lot of birth certificates but [being betrayed by someone] nazies hanged him”. To question “when he started to serve in underground”, priest J.Borevicius told: “When Germans came, nearly in the same time, I agreed to work in underground with those two colleagues saving Jews”. To question “whether you at any time were preaching about how nazies are conducting with Jews?” priest J.Borevicius told: “My method was to do something, not to speak”.

This important testimony of priest Jonas Borevicius, said on oath in court of USA, confirms explanations published by Genocide and resistance research centre of Lithuania (further - Centre) on 27th March 2019, regarding accusations towards Jonas Noreika – General Storm and gives background to make these conclusions.

1. Jonas Noreika actively participated in rescue of Siauliai Jews

Testimony of priest J.Borevicius regarding attempts of J.Noreika to rescue Siauliai Jews is supplemented by testimonies of other rescuers of Siauliai Jews.

Organizer of many of Siauliai Jews rescue operations Sofija Jasaitiene, awarded with Life saving cross, testifies that son of artisan of Frekel skin factory Jonukas “for purpose of rescue was transported to child asylum of Vaiguva” (*Those who saved the world. Saving of Jews in Lithuania 1941-1944*“,GRRCL, Vilnius, 2001, p.199), which was directly subordinate and financed by district administration board headed by J.Noreika. Head of the financial department of Siauliai district Antanas Gurevicius testifies that Vaiguva child asylum had hidden 7 Jewish children hidden and an adult Jew, she occupied asylum’s secretary position. (*A.Gurevicius lists, 1999, p.120*).

One of leaders of Siauliai Jew saviors network dr. Domas Jasaitis, awarded with Life saving cross, with the help of his efforts a promise of Hanz Gewecke, nazi commissar of Siauliai district was acquired to stop Jew killings in Siauliai region, testifies, that a common resistance council of Siauliai town and district anti-nazi organization “Lithuanian front” (Siauliai department governed by dr.D.Jasaitis, whereas Siauliai district – Jonas Noreika) published an underground newspaper “Lithuania” “ which has condemned killings of Jews and has reminded that all taking part in these activities, when Lithuania recovers, will be brought to courts justice and judged for committed murders or collaboration when executing them (*Those who saved the world. Saving of Jews in Lithuania 1941-1944*“,GRRCL, Vilnius, 2001, p.54, 58).

Sofija Jasaitiene testifies:”For one saved all families were brought into danger. Jew saving circumstances were so hard and complicated that in order to save one Jew, 5-10 persons should have involved” : for forging of personal document it was required “to find a man in municipality, who would put a stamp on a corresponding blank with attached photo”, it was required “ to find the determined, who were agreeing to accept such person without rights”, transport for his transportation was required, big finance for maintenance etc. (*Those who saved the world. Saving of Jews in Lithuania 1941-1944*“,GRRCL, Vilnius, 2001, p.197-198). It is obvious that such a vast developed Jew rescue activity as it was in Siauliai, would have been impossible without assistance of high officers of district and municipality.

Domas Jasaitis testifies, that”[Jew saving activity] was performed in secret, it was know only to those who were performing the act of rescue and those to whom that action was directed to. Secrecy is a big help to successful underground activity, but the biggest enemy of history, because usually leaves no documented evidence”. (*Those who saved the world. Saving of Jews in Lithuania 1941-1944*“,GRRCL, Vilnius, 2001, p.58).

2. J.Noreika is held to be a participant of anti-nazi resistance from the beginning of his work as head of Siauliai district

Priest. J.Borevicius testifies, that J.Noreika has invited to work for underground “approximately at a time when Germans came”. This testimony and historical circumstances allow to state that agreeing to become head of Siauliai district Jonas Noreika took this position as a cover for acting in underground. This statement is affirmed by these circumstances:

Minister of interior Jonas Slepetyš has offered to J.Noreika to become head of Siauliai district on 1st of August, when he arrived to Kaunas and brought a support signed by hundreds of Zemaiciai in support of provisional government of Lithuania which is being brought down by Germans. From testimonies of members of Provisional government it is obvious that at a time they understood that nazi will not allow for Lithuanian Government to act longer (*St. Raštikis, In fight for Lithuania, t. 2, Los Angeles, 1957, p.298-299; Z. Ivinskis, To freedom 1955 Nr. 6-43*).

“In the end of August, i.e. a week before J.Noreika’s appointment, Lithuanian activist front (LAF) headquarters decided to stop public activity of Lithuanian activist front (LAF) and transgress into anti nazi resistance underground” (*A. Damušis, To freedom 1955 Nr. 7-44*). J.Noreika was leader of LAF Telsiai district, therefore there is no doubt that before accepting to occupy new position J.Noreika has discussed with members of Government who were in preparation for underground activity the further political perspectives and purpose of his work in this position. Provisional government has appointed J.Noreika as head of Siauliai district just before it’s resignation.

After LAF suspended it’s activities from it’s core new anti-nazi underground organization was created Lithuanian front, J.Noreika appointed as head of Siauliai district underground (*Mindaugas Bloznelis, Lietuvių frontas, Kaunas, 2008, p.91, 382, 398, 399*). One of twelve founders of anti-nazi underground Lithuanian front, head of Siauliai anti-nazi underground D.Jasaitis testifies: “In this [head of Siauliai district] duty he [J.Noreika] got into contact with underground and was strongly defending state’s issues against occupiers” (*Lithuanian encyclopedia, XX volume, Boston, p.409*).

When leading the antinazi underground in Siauliai district in year 1942 J.Noreika has established Siauliai district headquarters of military department “Kestutis”, was procuring establishment of these headquarters in Telsiai and Mazeikiai districts, was procuring the weapons for reestablishment of Lithuanian military forces. It is to be noted that only those who were not dirty with collaboration with enemy were accepted to members of Kestutis department, therefore it is obvious that underground members did not held that Jonas Noreika work as head of Siauliai district is collaboration.

On February 23rd 1943 nazi has arrested J.Noreika and imprisoned in Stutthof concentration lager. For mass murder of Jews in Lithuania responsible German security police and SD head in Lithuania Karl Jager has accused J.Noreika that “was leading the Lithuanian opposition movement and especially agitated against Reich commissar proclaimed mobilization of Lithuanian nation (*Stutthof concentration camp prisoners cards, Archiwum Museum Stutthof, Sygn, I-III-11224*).

On 1946 saying the final word in soviet trial J.Noreika agreed with accusations on opposition to soviet government, even they threatened him death sentence, but he didn’t agree with non essential accusation in this case, say that he “voluntary served Germans” and held this accusation untrue. (*LYA, f-K1, ap.58,b.9792/3, t.4; V. Asmenskas, „General storm“, Vilnius, p. 359, 384*).

Totality of these circumstances allows to state, that J.Noreika is held to be participant of anti-nazi resistance from very beginning of his work as head of Siauliai district.

3. Until liquidation of Zagare ghetto J.Noreika did not understand that ghetto’s are one of the Holocaust stages

Paradox of why J.Noreika was transferring nazi orders on establishment of Zagare ghetto but later organized Jew rescue from Siauliai ghetto, so risking not only his own but the lives of his little daughter and wife, can be explained only in one way: until liquidation of Zagare ghetto J.Noreika and other Siauliai residents thought that Jews can only be safe in ghettos. Such outcome is affirmed by these circumstances.

In occupied Lithuania (same as elsewhere) nazi has left only one option for Jews to remain alive – to live in ghetto, because Jew caught behind the ghetto line in absence of special permit was sentenced to death.

To first mass killings in Gargzdai, Kaunas, Plunge and Gruzdiai forest (Siauliai district) Jews were brought not from specially established ghettos. Organizer of Jew annihilation in Kaunas, SS brigadenfurher W.Stahlecker in his report to German minister of interior H.Himmler wrote: "After first annihilation Jewish committee was summoned and it was stated that establishment of ghetto is the only mean to make normal living conditions. It was stated in address to cries of Jews, that there is no other opportunity to run from eyesight of possible future annihilations"(Henry A. Zeiger, *The case against Adolf Eichmann, The New American Library, 1960, p.64-67*).

Ex-prisoner of Siauliai ghetto Leiba Lipsicas testifies: "On August 15th 1941 our family was imprisoned in Siauliai ghetto. I was trying to hide at a known farmers in Deivai village but was forced to leave them. Having no other exit decided to get into [Siauliai] ghetto. If Jew has profession useful to Vermacht can produce items required for war he is required and is settled into ghetto. Others – liquidated". (*Leiba Lipsicas, Siauliai ghetto, I Chapter, old.skrastas.lt, 2001*).

There were statements in public space say that predecessor of J.Noreika, head of Siauliai district Ignas Urbaitis has resigned from office understanding that Jews will be executed in ghettos, are not true.

On 1944 being interrogated by NKVD I.Urbaitis answering the question why on 20th of July 1941 have he passed to his servants a nazi commandant Konovski order to establish ghetto in Zagare, he said: "When being head of Siauliai district I was guided by humanist purposes. I thought that when Jews will resettle to ghetto they will be protected under German laws, that then gestapo self –will, coercion and terror towards Jews will come to end. I don't know for what purposes did Germans shoot Jews living in Zagare ghetto. All these murders, executed by German government, had nothing to do with Lithuanian self governance". (*K 1, ap. 58, b P-20125, p.117-118*)

Commissar of Siauliai district Hanz Gewecke, one of initiators and organizers of Zagare and Siauliai ghettos, was telling after war that at a time he didn't understand that ghettos will end with execution of Jews. On 1969 court of Lubeck (Germany) has rejected Holocaust accusations to H.Gewecke and his assistant Evaldas Bubas; E.Bubas (which is described by D.Jasaitis as being sophisticated cruel) was completely acquitted, whereas H.Gewecke was sentenced to four and half years imprisonment for under his order B.Mazoveckis was hanged in Siauliai ghetto, for he secretly brought some food. (<https://www.tv3.lt/naujienu/lietuva/539141/miesto-istorija-aptaskyta-tukstanciu-zydu-krauju-1>).

According to international acts of law and Criminal code of Lithuania genocide is an activity which is performed consciously, willingly "seeking to physically annihilate all or part of the people". Until now unknown to historiography testimonies of priest Jonas Borevicius are important not only for Jonas Noreika – General Storm but also for history of all Lithuanian anti nazi resistance. These testimonies refute in essence soviet disinformation repeated as well as today, directed to discredit members of anti-soviet resistance, participants of uprising of June 1941. The most clear example of discrediting Jonas Noreika-General Storm is a book "Mass murder in Lithuania" published on KGB's order in 1973 (Mass murder in Lithuania, Chapter 2, Vilnius, 1973, p.8-10).

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