



## PARAMILITARISM AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR ITS APPLICATION: RESEARCH BY HISTORIANS AT KLAIPĖDA UNIVERSITY

Vygantas Vareikis  
Klaipėda University

220

In the autumn of 2015, Druka publishers brought out the study *The Will to Resist: Lithuanian Military Security Issues*, by Vygantas Vareikis, Vytautas Jokubauskas, Jonas Vaičėnionis and Hektoras Vitkus. The book completed the three-year project *The Role of Paramilitary Units in the National Defence System: Case of the Lithuanian Riflemen's Union* (MIP-001/2013) at Klaipėda University's Institute of Baltic Region History and Archaeology, led by Vygantas Vareikis and funded by the Research Council of Lithuania.

For history which counts time in millennia, three years is a mere a blink of an eye; for a human being, three years may be a period full of big and controversial events. In the spring of 2013, when the project was launched, anybody suggesting the possibility of armed conflict between the Russians and the Ukrainians in Ukraine, and the revival of the tough rhetoric of the Cold War and militarisation in Europe, would have been given a strange look. Three years after the launch of the project, security issues are in the spotlight of military and security professionals and the media all over Europe, information wars are going on, and the number of military conflicts has significantly increased.

The research into military history takes on a new meaning in the face of the threat that has never disappeared. Power games between states continue, and after all, a couple of decades ago, military historians argued that in the future the number of wars and conflicts would grow, but not vice versa. Therefore, at the beginning of the above-mentioned research, problems of an academic nature were raised, and answers to questions formulated on the basis of scientific hypotheses and insights were looked for, while due to the changes in the security situation in East-Central Europe, and Lithuania's greater concerns about national military defence, the results of the project have acquired the value of practical application. It was no accident that the final seminar in the project was held in the Officers' Club in Kaunas, in collaboration with the Lithuanian army and the Lithuanian Riflemen's Union (Lietuvos šaulių sąjunga, LRU). The intention was to show that research into historical experience could contribute to the debates on issues of national security and military defence.

In the history of warfare, an analysis of conventional wars predominated for a long time in the tradition of the outstanding theoretician Carl von Clausewitz, in accor-

dance with which the goal of regular forces was to defeat the enemy in the battlefield. Guerilla warfare, or 'little war', was then viewed only as a potential additional measure, to fight in areas which could not be directly reached by the enemy's military forces. According to some researchers, the roots of guerilla resistance or guerilla tactics in warfare date back to prehistoric times, and guerilla warfare techniques are still valid. As is proven by the historical tradition, the phenomenon of guerilla resistance rested on a voluntary basis, since in the absence of the possibility to monitor and lead combatant action, only motivated volunteers are able to act under conditions of guerilla war for a period of time. Lithuanian history of the 19th and 20th centuries boasts a number of examples of guerilla resistance, caused by the imbalance of human, economic and military force.

The authors of the research have focused on an analysis of the organisation of guerilla, and not conventional, warfare and resistance in Lithuania, in order to prove that the movement and its preliminary organisation were effective in 20th-century Lithuanian history, and the experience and the opportunities for its application could also be used in Lithuania in the 21st century in order to ensure military security.

The implementors of the project have presented the results at international conferences and seminars in Lithuania, Poland, Latvia and Ukraine, and they have also prepared the research results, with a special focus on two monographs and a digital reference book on members of the interwar LRU, and presented it to the general public.<sup>1</sup>

The team of researchers in paramilitary studies analysed the activities of the LRU after the First World War, the riflemen's training in the interwar period, forms of rapprochement in the society of the Republic of Lithuania, and the principles of civil warfare and paramilitary culture through the ideology of the LRU (the paradigm of *riflemanism* [*sušaulinimas*] as a social activity, the propaganda of national warfare, and the promotion of physical culture).

The final monograph in the project presents the participation of paramilitary groups in the uprising of June 1941 (and simultaneously notes the fact of participation by some riflemen in the Holocaust), and reveals the extent to which the riflemen, linked by long-term social relations, participated in the armed anti-Soviet resistance after the war. The participants in the project proved that one of the essential moments in the genesis of the guerilla resistance in the years 1944 to 1953 was the ideological continuity of the *riflemanism* tradition developed in the interwar period: the impact

<sup>1</sup> JOKUBAUSKAS, V. „Mažųjų kariuomenių“ galia ir paramilitarizmas. Tarpukario Lietuvos atvejis [The Power of 'Small Armies' and Paramilitarism. The Case of Interwar Lithuania]. Klaipėda, 2014; JOKUBAUSKAS, V.; VAIČENONIS, J.; VAREIKIS, V.; VITKUS, H. *Valia priešintis. Paramilitarizmas ir Lietuvos karinio saugumo problemos*. [The Will to Resist. Paramilitarism and Questions of Lithuania's National Security]. Ed. by H. VITKUS, V. VAREIKIS. Klaipėda, 2015; JOKUBAUSKAS, V.; VITKUS, H. *Lietuvos šaulių sąjungos nariai (1919–1940 m.): informacinis žinynas* [Members of the Lithuanian Riflemen's Union (1919–1940): a reference book]. [DVD]. Klaipėda, 2015.

of *riflemanism* was revealed not only in the press of the armed underground, and in guerilla badges and uniforms, but also in the level of moral preparedness.

The monograph by Vytautas Jokubauskas, based on his PhD thesis, defended at Klaipėda University, and published at the end of 2014, proves that guerilla resistance, or the application of guerilla warfare techniques, was one of the distinctive characteristics of the Lithuanian armed defence. Although some traits of guerilla warfare could be found in the uprisings in the 19th century, in the years 1918 to 1923 it became a form of contemporary national armed defence, and part of national defence policy.

The emphasis on guerilla resistance in the event of war in interwar Lithuania was not an exceptional case in the eastern Baltic region. The Lithuanian army planned the active application of guerilla warfare techniques, which were included in military statutes. Guerilla units were expected to act alongside regular forces, while a large part of the nation was to be involved in guerilla activities under the leadership of people trained by the Lithuanian armed forces: officers, Riflemen, non-commissioned officers and soldiers. In practice, guerilla resistance was used in the uprising of June 1914, and during the guerilla war in the years 1944 to 1953. The application of guerilla resistance or guerilla techniques in the armed forces of restored Lithuania presents *one of the principal modes of military action* applied as a component of defence in cities, of action in small units, and of maneuver defence. The concept of 21st-century guerilla resistance has been indoctrinated through the content of the curricula in educational institutions, the memorialisation of guerilla war, and national commemorations; however, no broader civic training for paramilitary activities has been carried out.

To date, the issues of the military activity and ideology of the Lithuanian Riflemen's Union, the functioning of the interwar army, and anti-Soviet resistance have been rather extensively analysed in Lithuanian historiography (with certain differences in research quality, the degree of investigation, and methodological approaches). However, since statehood was restored in 1990, warfare has not received any special attention from Lithuanian researchers. We can just note the research by Deividas Šlekys<sup>2</sup> conducted in the field of political sciences at Vilnius University.

In their analysis of the current situation, the implementors of the project at Klaipėda University on the history of paramilitarism argue that Lithuania's military security has often been determined by the combination of *two historical myths*: the 'all alone' fight and the 'mandatory allied support', which could be called a national security paradigm. The planning of military defence in the restored Republic of Lithuania tends to maneuver between individual and collective defence concepts that correlate with the

<sup>2</sup> The research *The State of the Military Thought and its Development in Lithuania after the Restoration of Independence (1990–2012)* was funded by the Research Council of Lithuania from the funds of the postdoc studies project. ŠLEKYS, D. Dvi karo sampratos. Pastabos civilizacijos ir istorijos rašymo klausimais. *Naujasis židinys-Aidai*, 2015, Nr. 4, p. 22.

strategy of the first half of the 20th century. Over the last two centuries, the strategy of Lithuanian warfare (including the uprisings in the 19th century) was often based on the principle that, in the event of military aggression, it was important to hold out for some time, and then get support from outside. Given the geopolitical situation of the 21st century, the changed security environment, and membership of a collective security alliance, that is, Nato, one can argue that in the future the focus will stay on the synergy of individual and collective defence, which is essentially based on the same concept: 'all alone' and 'mandatory allied support'. In this context, the element of deterrence, also used in the interwar period, becomes relevant, as well as the diversification of political decision-making and the control of the armed forces, so that any actions by individuals or interest groups affected by external forces would not be able to impact the actions of the defence forces, as happened in 1940. The authors argue that, in order to achieve diversification of political decision-making, it would be necessary to reinforce and maintain the LRU as a National Guard, separate from the army. In the event of a crisis, the LRU would have sufficiently strong headquarters and a membership network to enable a prompt response to the military threat all over Lithuania, should external forces paralyse the decision-making at the highest political level. Perhaps the insights presented do not currently sound very persuasive; however, an analysis of cases of armed resistance in Lithuania suggests that the biggest problem for national security is timely political decision-making and the presence of a *will to resist*, rather than the level of training of the armed forces.

As is proven by the research conducted at Klaipėda University, paramilitarism provides an opportunity for small states facing the problem of military security to involve wide civil circles in the defence of their country, to increase their military power, and to strengthen not only the physical and conceptual, but especially the moral component of military power, when most of the active population, and not only specially trained professionals, are ready to defend their state not simply in words but also in actions.