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THE POPULATION OF THE KLAIPĖDA REGION AFTER 1945: A CASE OF REPATRIATES¹

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Introduction

To quote Victor Sebestyén, “after the First World War, the borders changed and new countries were created, however, people remained where they had lived before the war”². After the Second World War, the opposite happened, since, during the Red Army offensive, almost 12 million Germans were driven to the West; they were forced to leave their native homes, and the majority of them, forever³.

From among all the German lands, it was East Prussia, the northern part of the state of Prussia and of the German Reich, that was the worst-hit area. The years 1944–1945 is an important caesura marking radical political, social, demographic, and national changes in the entire region of East Prussia which since March 1939 had also included the Klaipėda Region. The evacuation of the Klaipėda Region population started at the beginning of October 1944, and in the rest of East Prussia, at the beginning of 1945, and those were undoubtedly “the most dramatic events of the Second World War that killed huge numbers of people and almost cleared the region of the former population”⁴.

¹ The paper was written in the framework of the project *Klaipėda Region 1945–1960: the Formation of a New Society and its Reflections in Family Stories*, funded by the Research Council of Lithuania (No. LIP-091/2016, 2016–2018)

² V. Sebestyén, *Modernaus pasaulio kūrimas*, Vilnius 2015, p. 16.

³ Ibidem.

⁴ A. Sakson, *Von Memel bis Allenstein. Die heutigen Bewohner des ehemaligen Ostpreußens: Memelland, Kaliningrader Gebiet, Ermland und Masuren*, Frankfurt am Main 2016, p. 145.

After the Second World War, both the status of the region's political affiliation and the composition of the people in the region changed. East Prussia, like all Prussia, after 1945 was deleted from the map of Europe and divided: two-thirds of the East Prussian area (Warmia and Masuria) went to Poland; "Königsberg and the surrounding regions were annexed to the Russian Soviet Socialist Republic, and the Region of Memel (Klaipėda) became part of Lithuania [Soviet – S.P.]"⁵. The former East Prussia appeared in a completely new political environment, dictated by the ideology of the Soviet power which shaped and claimed new economic, social, and cultural networks for the region by eliminating the previous multiculturalism of the country, destroying centuries-old religious Protestant traditions, and accommodating culturally, and often nationally, alien people. One can definitely argue that "1945 was a "zero hour", marking the beginning of the new epoch of the fallen eastern Prussia"⁶.

In the first postwar years, the divided lands of the former East Prussia were undergoing radical demographic changes, featuring different aspects in each of the three parts; however, most importantly, after 1945, people who settled/were accommodated there had no historical ties with the land. When speaking about the part of East Prussia that went to Poland, Robert Traba noted that "Poles moved there, and later Ukrainians, who became more or less incidental heirs of the German property"⁷ and in the case of the Kaliningrad Region, it was mostly Russian speakers; the Klaipėda Region mainly accommodated Lithuanians from other areas of Lithuania. The new settlers in the Klaipėda Region encountered not only the "German" material heritage, but also a handful of the remaining indigenous people. As stated by official documents, around 1950, about 15–20,000 local residents (of Lithuanian and German descent)⁸, were left in the Klaipėda Region, including about 8,000 repatriates⁹.

The aim of the present paper is to discuss the situation of the repatriates of the Klaipėda Region in the first post-war years, based on unpublished and published memories of local people and archival documents. The chronological boundaries of the research are focused on the period of 1945–1951, as we shall mostly look into the situation of the population having returned from the German occupation zones to the Klaipėda Region during the period in question. So far, fragmentary attention has been given to the topic, as well as to the entire history of the Klaipė-

⁵ Ю. Костяшов, *Изгнание прусского духа*, Terra Baltica, vol. 3, Калининград 2003, p. 9.

⁶ A. Sakson, op. cit., p. 157.

⁷ R. Traba, *Kraštovaizdžio mitologizavimas kaip nacionalinės saviugdos veiksnys XX amžiaus pirmojoje pusėje. Rytų Prūsijos pavyzdys*, Acta historica universitatis Klaipedensis, t. XXIV: *Erdvių pasisavinimas Rytų Prūsijoje XX amžiuje*, ed. by: V. Safronovas, Klaipėda 2012, pp. 23–50, 42.

⁸ A. Kossert, *Ostpreußen. Geschichte und Mythos*, München 2007, p. 363.

⁹ N. Kairiūkštė, *Klaipėdos krašto repatriantai ir jų padėtis 1945–1950 m.*, Lituania, 1991, nr 2(6), p. 45.

da Region after 1945. The situation of the repatriates after 1945 was an integral part of the demographic processes that took place in the Klaipėda Region over all the post-war years; however, it has to be noted that there is a shortage of research on the population of the Region, the reasons for moving to it, the composition of the new population, or the relations between the new settlers and the remaining indigenous people. In this context, the works of Nastasija Kairiūkštytė on the aspects of the region's population after 1945¹⁰, repatriation of Lithuanian people from Germany in 1945¹¹, and the situation of repatriates in the Klaipėda Region¹² deserve to be mentioned. The traits of the repatriates' status have been discussed by Arūnė Liucija Arbušauskaitė¹³, who has also analyzed the demographic processes on the Curonian Spit after 1945¹⁴. Based on the archival materials, Arbušauskaitė presented the situation of the indigenous population in the Region at the end of 1944, concluding that "there was no family in the Klaipėda Region that had not been deprived of something"¹⁵ e.g. that had suffered from the looting of Soviet soldiers. Vasilijus Safronovas has fragmentarily discussed the number of repatriates in the general context of the post-war city of Klaipėda¹⁶. The experiences of the local population, including the repatriated, have also been presented in a small collection of published memoirs¹⁷ and in a regional studies-type essay¹⁸. The exploration of the postwar history of the Klaipėda Region is important for, and relevant to, the comparative studies of all the former East Prussia after 1945. One has to admit that the works of Russians, Poles, and Germans on the development of the Kaliningrad Region and the part of Prussia that had been annexed to Poland under the new political and economic conditions have been incomparably more numerous and thematically more diverse. Even though foreign researchers also investigate the history of Klaipėda Region¹⁹, the analysis of the then demographic processes in the remaining area of East Prussia has remained an important priority for researchers establishing the circumstances of the arrival and accommodation of colonists in

¹⁰ Eadem, *Klaipėdos krašto vietovių apgyvendinimas pirmaisiais pokario metais*, [in:] *Lietuvininkų kraštas*, ed. by: N. Vėlius, Kaunas 1995, pp. 339–371.

¹¹ Eadem, *Lietuvos gyventojų repatriacija iš Vokietijos 1945 metais*, *Lituanistica*, 1990, nr 2, pp. 45–59.

¹² Eadem, *Klaipėdos krašto repatriantai ir jų padėtis 1945–1950 m.*, pp. 35–48.

¹³ A. L. Arbušauskaitė, *Klaipėdos krašto repatriantai: jų statuso bruožai*, [in:] *Socialinės grupės: raiška ir ypatumai*, ed. by: A. Vosyliūtė, Vilnius 1998, pp. 89–98.

¹⁴ Eadem, *Kuršių nerijos gyventojų socialiniai-demografiniai pokyčiai*, [in:] *Lietuvininkų kraštas*, pp. 372–397.

¹⁵ Eadem, „Klaipėdos krašte nėra nė vienos šeimos, iš kurios nebūtų kas nors atimta“, *Acta historica universitatis Klaipedensis*, t. XVIII: *Antrojo pasaulinio karo pabaiga Rytų Prūsijoje: faktai ir istorinės įžvalgos*, Klaipėda 2009, pp. 322–330.

¹⁶ V. Safronovas, „Lietuviškos“ praeities aktualizavimas kaip tapatumo orientacijos raiška pokario Klaipėdoje, *Lietuvos istorijos metraštis*, [2007 metai], vol. 2, 2008, pp. 59–84.

¹⁷ For one of the latest publications of memoirs, see: *Klaipėdos krašto atsiminimai*, Klaipėda 2009.

¹⁸ K. Kaukas, *Tėvų ir protėvių dvasia*, Klaipėda 1996; V. Kaltenis, *Ak, gražus dangaul!*, Vilnius 2008.

¹⁹ R. Kibelka, *Memelland. Fünf Jahrzehnte Nachkriegsgeschichte*, Berlin 2002.

Kaliningrad Region²⁰, as well as the population movement processes in the former German part of Poland²¹. Therefore, one can state that the analysis of the Klaipėda Region development after the Second World War is a very important component in the context of the conception of changes in the former Eastern Prussia²².

The principle base of sources for the present research has been archival documents of the Central State Archives of Lithuania, *Arbeitsgemeinschaft der Memelländer*, accumulated since the postwar period in Germany, the published memoirs of the inhabitants of Klaipėda Region, and unpublished interviews, collected from 2016 in the framework of the Research Council of Lithuania – funded project *Klaipėda Region 1945–1960: the Formation of a New Society and its Reflections in Family Stories*.

Rerreat: „All the time we felt the Russian Army was close by“

With the Second World War coming to a close, the population of the Klaipėda Region experienced two evacuations to the heart of Germany: one at the end of July/the beginning of August, and the second, at the beginning of early October. The people were retreating in the direction of Tilsit, in the direction of Šilutė towards the Ventė Cape, towards Mingė closer to the Curonian Lagoon, and through the Curonian Spit towards the then Cranz and Königsberg. „It happened on the 6th of October in 1944 [...]. In such a two-horse cart we were going, in a string of carts. It was like that, there was a string of carts, they were standing all along the road and on the right-hand side, while on the left-hand side, soldiers were walking – German soldiers. German tanks and different machines were driving behind the canals and ditches [...]. And suddenly near the Rudynai forest of Šilutė – from the forest Russian tanks appeared [...] They were shooting at us, we managed to escape, but our carts and all the horses were destroyed. [...] The German army soldiers also ran there – they all ran towards the lagoon. Well, and they ... we children were all hungry, tired of all that walking, so we were fed, allowed to sleep, and shown where to go. And then we found ourselves in Aukštumalė – there was such a village, Aukštumalė (the present Šilutė district – S.P.). And we were in the last house ... the local inhabitants were Germans ... the family had left, and the table was loaded with meals”²³.

²⁰ The most characteristic work on the subject: *Восточная Пруссия глазами советских переселенцев. Первые годы Калининградской области в воспоминаниях и документах*, Сост. Ю.В. Костяшов, Санкт Петербург 2002.

²¹ See: *Ślązacy, Kaszubi, Mazurzy i Warmiacy – między polskością a niemieckością*, red. A. Sakson, Olsztyn 2008; R. Tomkiewicz, *Życie codzienne mieszkańców powojennego Olsztyna 1945–1956*, Olsztyn 2003; B. Halicka, *Mein Haus an der Oder: Erinnerungen Polnischer Neusiedler in Westpolen nach 1945*, Paderborn 2014.

²² A. Sakson, op. cit., passim.

²³ Memories of a man born in 1936 [IS10_KLPK_VV1936vt]. The database of the RCL-funded project *Klaipėda Region 1945–1960: the Formation of a New Society and its Reflections in Family Stories*

The inhabitants of the Curonian Spit remembered the loss of homeland: “Our family initially left for Sambia, we were close to the famous Cranz (the present Zelenogradsk, Kaliningrad Region – S. P.), a resort where our mother made up her mind to return home to Juodkrantė at least for a short time. Despite the ban of the military authorities, she went back to Juodkrantė on foot, and the picture she saw there was depressing: the household was managed by soldiers, a lot of dishes were broken; she took her sewing machine and returned to her children in Sambia”²⁴.

Those retreating in the direction of Tilsit went through tragic experiences. The Louise’s Bridge over the Nemunas in Tilsit became a kind of a survival bridge: “[...] through Geniai, Mikytai [...] we reached the highway Tauragė–Tilsit and went towards there. It took us three days to cross the Louise’s Bridge [...]. We arrived in the city of Friedland in eight days. [...] thousands of cars were riding, people on bicycles, with rucksacks, were fleeing from Latvia, Lithuania, and East Prussia [...]”²⁵.

Those who lived in the neighbourhood of Tilsit saw the start of the city bombing. „The shooting began (the beginning of October, 1944 – S.P.). We were first hiding in the cellar (in a small township in Panemunė on the Nemunas River, opposite Tilsit.– S.P.). More people rushed in. [...] When the city of Tilsit was bombed, [...] such grenades were thrown that a human being looked like they had been cut in two with a knife. The explosions felled the trees and ripped off the roofs of houses. The tops of the trees fell as if they were cut down. After one bombardment, we saw how a lot of bodies of killed people were laid down in long excavated ditches... [...] During the shootings we heard all kinds of voices shouting: both in German and in Russian, in Lithuanian and in Polish. [...] After the German order to retreat, we had to be in a great hurry. [...] We harnessed the horse and together with my husband put on the cart whatever we had managed to collect in a hurry. [...] It was October. We left the beetroots in the field, while the potatoes had already been dug out. [...] People were fleeing from the war as well as they could. I saw a woman with a suitcase in one hand and a young kid in the other. [...] When retreating, civilians were burying a lot of their belongings in the ground. Before leaving home, I let out the chicken. We took a sack of flour. I had baked bread recently, I took it with me. We would have frozen, but it was good we had a featherbed in our cart, and a carpet on the bottom. [...] It was not cold when we were retreating towards Königsberg. We were joined by others on the way. [...] We would drive into empty houses left by the Germans, light up the stove, and make some meals. [...] In the barns aban-

²⁴ N. Strakauskaitė, *Kuršių nerija – pasitraukimo kelias: atminties tiltas*, Acta historica universitatis Klaipedensis, t. XVIII: *Antrojo pasaulinio karo pabaiga Rytų Prūsijoje: faktai ir istorinės įžvalgos*, Klaipėda 2009, p. 156.

²⁵ Memories of a man born in 1929 [SP03–KLP_VL1929]. The database of the RCL-funded project *Klaipėda Region 1945–1960: the Formation of a New Society and its Reflections in Family Stories*.

doned by people we would take some fodder. Abandoned animals strayed in the fields. On our way, we changed horses. [...] Once we found a horse, one side was fine, and the other one was injured by bullets. We felt all the time that the Russian army was already near”²⁶.

The vast majority of the local population experienced the odysseys of retreating from the Klaipėda Region, although some of them succeeded in staying in their native homes or surviving the horrors of the front zone by finding shelter in the neighbouring areas. „On the 11th of October [...], Russians arrived in Svencele [a village at the Curonian Lagoon, the present Klaipėda district – S.P.]. A small group dropped in at our place and took away younger men [...]. In the evening they came again, but did nothing to us [...]. The days before had been very worrying. We had an order to leave, to drive the animals together [...]”²⁷, but “we stayed [...], we wasted too much time, if our parents had just left earlier [...]”²⁸.

The number of Klaipedians who had stayed in it at the end of 1944 and in the first months of 1945, compared with the population in the Region in 1939, was very small. As indicated by Kairiūkšytė, in 1939, 153,000 inhabitants lived in the Klaipėda Region, and at the beginning of 1945, there were about 20,000 of them, while the number of the old Klaipedians in October 1945 amounted merely to 2,800²⁹.

Accommodation: „All the houses were empty, we saw no civilians“

The 2,800 inhabitants also included those who, alone or in small groups, returned home from the heart of the Klaipėda Region or from neighbouring East Prussian areas in the first months of 1945. “When going [home to Pagėgiai – S.P.] in winter [the beginning of 1945 – S.P.] from the German camp, we saw cows frozen in the ice on the lake. All the winter we kept moving in the Karaliaučius Region and returned home before Palm Sunday [25 March 1945 – S.P.]. We saw a lot of ruins and dead soldiers and civilians. [...]. We would drop in at homesteads, as we needed water, food, and the night’s rest under the roof [...]. While moving from Karaliaučius to the Nemunas, we found only two women alive in one house, the other houses were empty. We saw dead people in beds. Only in one place in an

²⁶ The memories of Ona Lukošienė (1900–1993), an inhabitant of Pagėgiai, recorded by Stasė Valužienė in 1986. The database of the RCL-funded project *Klaipėda Region 1945–1960: the Formation of a New Society and its Reflections in Family Stories*.

²⁷ M. Toleikis, *Ir žodžiai tapo kūnu*, Klaipėda 2008, p. 184.

²⁸ Memories of a woman born in 1938 [SK02_KLP_ML1938vt]. The database of the RCL-funded project *Klaipėda Region 1945–1960: the Formation of a New Society and its Reflections in Family Stories*.

²⁹ N. Kairiūkšytė, *Klaipėdos krašto repatriantai ir jų padėtis 1945–1950 m.*, p. 35.

empty house we found a surviving hen, we saw no dogs, and the cats had become wild[...]. Thus came March of 1945 [...]. We were one of the first to return home, the rest came only in summer. We came back to Pagėgiai. All the houses were empty, no civilians to be seen. The township looked scary. Barbed wire was stretched everywhere. There were three policemen there, unmarried, Lithuanians. And a lot of Russian soldiers”³⁰.

To populate the deserted land, the Central Committee of the Lithuanian Communist Party (on 28 January 1945, the Soviet Army occupied Klaipėda – the entire Klaipėda Region fell under Soviet rule) adopted a resolution in March 1945 *On the Population of the Klaipėda Region*, which provided for the transfer of 13,000 families there from different areas of Lithuania. In the mid-year, the plan was adjusted and the numbers reduced, and by the end of the year, 5,300 families had been accommodated in the Region³¹. The so-called new-settlers formed one of the groups of the postwar Klaipėda Region population. Among other groups, another one to be identified were people of different nationalities who had arrived from different places of the Soviet Union, mainly the Communist Party and administrative staff, as well as workers, the majority of which had been accommodated in the city of Klaipėda. The third group was the above-mentioned local residents of the Klaipėda Region who had survived the war in the neighbouring environs of East Prussia. The fourth group were repatriates who by the spring of 1945 “had returned home from the Soviet, English, American, and French zones in Germany and Austria”³².

The present research does not seek to establish the exact numbers of those who repatriated to the Klaipėda Region³³ or to question the numbers already published in historiography; it aims to reveal the situation of the repatriated indigenous people in their own/alien Klaipėda Region and their relations with the new settlers who had moved into the region.

Repatriation, as a process of the population returning / being returned, took place all over Lithuania. The first resolution of the Council of People’s Commissars on the organization of repatriation was adopted as early as in August 1944,

³⁰ The memories of Ona Lukošienė (1900–1993), an inhabitant of Pagėgiai, recorded by Stasė Valužienė in 1986. The database of the RCL-funded project *Klaipėda Region 1945–1960: the Formation of a New Society and its Reflections in Family Stories*.

³¹ N. Kairiūkštytė, op. cit., p. 35.

³² Eadem, *Klaipėdos krašto vietovių apgyvendinimas pirmaisiais pokario metais*, p. 351.

³³ Based on the data of N. Kairiūkštytė, about 29,000 people returned to Lithuania in 1945, including 4,700 people to the Klaipėda Region. See: Eadem, *Klaipėdos krašto repatriantai ir jų padėtis 1945–1950 m.*, p. 36. Altogether, before 1950, the number of the Klaipėda Region repatriates is estimated to have been 7,000 to 8,000. See: Eadem, *Klaipėdos krašto vietovių apgyvendinimas pirmaisiais pokario metais*, p. 351. In the period of 1945–1949, about 2,000 repatriates could have been accommodated in the city of Klaipėda. See: V. Safronovas, op. cit., p. 60.

and the re-evacuation centres were established in Kaunas, Naujoji Vilnia, Šiauliai, and Panevėžys³⁴. On 17 February 1945, in the instructions of the Council of People's Commissars of the Lithuanian SSR, the situation of the Klaipėda Region was already actualized by indicating that the Klaipėda and Pagėgiai Counties were attached to the Repatriates' Reception and Distribution Centre at the Telšiai County Executive Committee³⁵. The instruction detailed the reception of the returning citizens, their material provision, and accommodation, indicating that peasants and villagers were to be taken to their former households³⁶, which was especially relevant in the case of the Klaipėda Region population mainly returning to villages.

Even though the Soviet instructions of the beginning of 1945 spoke about potential repatriates to the Klaipėda Region, the USSR Communist Party documents of the middle of the same year expressed dissatisfaction with the process of its populating. As indicated, at the end of July the transfer of the population from other regions of Lithuania was implemented only by 38,9%, quite a few farms in the region were left unattended, or their former owners, "Germanised Lithuanians", were settling in them again on returning from Germany. Over the last one and a half months, 611 people returned to 271 farms in the Klaipėda Region³⁷, while only 134 new settlers moved from Lithuania to the region over the same period and settled in 43 farms³⁸. In accordance with the documents, the returnees were arbitrarily establishing themselves in their former farms and conducting anti-Soviet agitation among the new settlers to the effect that allegedly all the former owners were going to return from Germany and to evict the newcomers, therefore the aliens could not expect to settle down there for long. In order to resolve the situation of the local inhabitants, unfavorable for Soviet politics, a drastic solution was proposed: not only to prohibit the USSR People's Commissariat for Interior Affairs to direct the returnees to their former places of residence, but to send them outside the territory of the Lithuanian SSR, as well as immediately evict all the inhabitants of German

³⁴ Resolution No. 79 of the Council of People's Commissars of the Lithuanian SSR *Regarding the Organisation of the Re-evacuation of Citizens of Other Republics of the USSR to the Old Places of Residence in the Territory of the Lithuanian SSR*, 1944 08 18. Lietuvos centrinių valstybės archyvas [Lithuanian Central State Archiv], f. R-754, ap. 4, b. 170, l. 42.

³⁵ Instruction of the Deputy Chairman of the Council of People's Commissars of the Lithuanian SSR *Regarding the Reception, Distribution, Accommodation, and Provision of Jobs to the Citizens of the USSR, deported from the Lithuanian SSR during the German Occupation and Currently Returning to their Homeland*. 1945 02 17. LCVA, f. R-754, ap. 4, b. 170, l. 33.

³⁶ Ibidem, l. 35.

³⁷ 2 August 1945, Vilnius. M. Suslov's official Letter to G. Malenkov on the Resolution of the Council of People's Commissars of the USSR. *On Transferring Peasant Farms to Klaipėda, Šilutė and Pagėgiai Counties from other Counties of the Lithuanian SSR*, [in:] Lietuvos sovietizavimas, 1944–1947 m.: VKP(b) CK dokumentai: dokumentų rinkinys, ed. by: M. Pocius, Vilnius 2015, pp. 291–292.

³⁸ 2 August 1945, Vilnius. V. Pisarev's statement to M. Suslov on the implementation of the Resolution of the Council of People's Commissars of the USSR *On Transferring Peasant Farms to Klaipėda, Šilutė and Pagėgiai Counties from other Counties of the Lithuanian SSR*, [in:] ibidem, p. 290.

ancestry who at the time lived in the territory of the Klaipėda Region³⁹. Based on the later data and on the analysis of the repatriation process, it has to be noted that the drastic proposals regarding local repatriates were not implemented.

The repatriates were received, registered, and provided with allowances in the Reception and Distribution Centres, with one of them operating in the Klaipėda County as early as in the mid-1945. In 1946, instead of those centres, Re-evacuation (renamed Repatriation in 1947) Departments were established at the District Executive Committees, and since 1950, at the County Executive Committees⁴⁰. Despite a wide network of repatriation institutions in Vilnius and in counties and the statistics kept by them, the data on the number of the returnees over the period of 1945 to 1950 varied around 8,000⁴¹. As for the repatriates in the context of the present research, the data on their accommodation upon returning are important: where they were directed, whether to the same place from which they had left or to another. Incidentally, it should be noted that, based on the archival documents, the concept *Klaipėda Region repatriates* should not be related merely to the inhabitants coming from the Klaipėda Region. In the postwar years, residents of other places of Lithuania⁴² or other regions of the USSR⁴³ were included in the lists of the Klaipėda Region repatriates who received one-time allowances.

Repatriates' accommodation: „Nobody allowed us to return there”

The information on the repatriates' life in the region presupposed a problem of the relationship between the returnees and the new settlers: the process of the region's populating with new settlers was taking place in parallel with the repatriation, therefore, the clashes between the old and the new inhabitants of the land were unavoidable. As witnessed by documents, in 1945, when the process of the newcomers' settling was just gaining momentum, most of the repatriates could go

³⁹ 2 August 1945, Vilnius. M.Suslov's official Letter to G. Malenkov on the Resolution of the Council of People's Commissars of the USSR. *On Transferring Peasant Farms to Klaipėda, Šilutė and Pagėgiai Counties from other Counties of the Lithuanian SSR*, [in:] *ibidem*, p. 292.

⁴⁰ For more details on the network and activities of repatriation institutions, see: N. Kairiūkštytė, *Klaipėdos krašto repatriantai ir jų padėtis 1945–1950 m.*, pp. 35–36.

⁴¹ For more details, see: V. Safronovas, *op. cit.*, pp. 60–61.

⁴² On 4 May 1947, a family with 5 children repatriated and were accommodated in the city of Klaipėda, although previously they had lived in the village of Jokūbavas, Klaipėda district. See: a list of repatriates who settled in the Klaipėda County. 1947 06 09. LCVA, f. R-754, ap. 4, b. 1193, l. 7.

⁴³ The list of repatriates who received one-time allowances of 200 to 400 roubles, submitted by the Executive Committee of Klaipėda City in November 1948, included people from Rostov, Leningrad, and Odessa. They were included in the category of repatriates, however, we have no data whether they stayed to live in the City/Region of Klaipėda. See: Pay-sheet of the issued one-time allowances to the repatriating citizens of the USSR, Executive Committee of Klaipėda City, November 1948. LCVA, f. R-754, ap. 4, b. 1553, l. 16.

to their previous places of residence. Thus, e.g., M.P., a woman born in 1914, who had fled from the village of Kairiai, Priekulė rural district, Klaipėda County on 8 October 1945, was repatriated to the same village on 3 June 1945⁴⁴. The old residents of the Curonian Spit were also quite frequently directed to the previous places of residence in Nida or Juodkrantė⁴⁵. On the other hand, it has to be noted that the majority of the repatriates could not return to their farms because of the new inhabitants who had settled there or because the farm had been destroyed during the war, even though, as mentioned above, in accordance with the instruction approved by the Council of People's Commissars of the Lithuanian SSR on 17 February 1945, repatriated peasants were to be accommodated in their former farms⁴⁶. "We returned from Germany [in 1947 or 1948 – S.P.] to our own house [the village of Pempininkai, the suburb of Klaipėda – S.P.] and found it occupied, people were living there. So we said – it was our house. The people who lived in Pempininkai: "We are not going anywhere, the authorities gave it to us, let them give us another apartment, and then we shall go, now we have no place to go to"⁴⁷.

Another Klaipėdian witnessed: "The war was hard on all of us... Despite that, people had mainly come from Lithuania. From Lithuania Major. And they [...] had settled in the apartments or farms of the people of the Klaipėda Region [...] And they were afraid to be turned out of the houses. They hated us terribly. We [...] had been born in Antleičiai [the present Šilutė district – S.P.], ... but we were not allowed to return there, [...] other people lived there and we were told to find another place, we were offered three places and settled down in Žemaitkiemis [the present Šilutė district – S.P.]"⁴⁸.

Those testimonies of the local repatriates about their establishment in the Klaipėda Region implied another, so far little investigated relationship between the indigenous inhabitants of the region and the new settlers, as well as the attitude of the new settlers and the representatives of the new Soviet power towards them. After the repatriates had returned, the new settlers could not be evicted, as, under Directive No. 2, 2 January 1948, of the Ministry of Agriculture of the Lithuanian SSR, "the plots of land and the buildings that had already been transferred to, and

⁴⁴ The list of the repatriated USSR citizens accommodated in the Klaipėda County [1945]. LCVA, f. R-754, ap. 4, b. 425, l. 7.

⁴⁵ Among those who returned between 30 September and 5 October 1945, the names of Fridrichas Kalniškis, Jonas Sakutis (Nida), Martinas Šelbokas, Mikas Kairys (Juodkrantė) were mentioned. See: Information about the USSR Citizens who were Deported from the Lithuanian SSR in the Years of German Occupation and are Currently Returning to their Homeland; from 30 September 1945 to 5 October 1945, returned to the Klaipėda County. LCVA, f. R-754, ap. 4, b. 425, l. 23.

⁴⁶ See footnotes 36 and 37.

⁴⁷ Memories of a man born in 1942 [SK-SP09_KLPK_VL1942vt]. The database of the RCL-funded project *Klaipėda Region 1945–1960: the Formation of a New Society and its Reflections in Family Stories*

⁴⁸ Memories of a man born in 1937 [IS08_VLN_VL1937vt]. The database of the RCL-funded project *Klaipėda Region 1945–1960: the Formation of a New Society and its Reflections in Family Stories*.

managed by, new settlers could not be transferred to others”⁴⁹; repatriates could have expected to receive land from the fund of unallocated lands⁵⁰, however, frequently they were not getting any farm, even though “based on the data of 21 June 1948, in the County of Klaipėda, 230, in Šilutė, 140, and in Pagėgiai, 180 farms had no owners”⁵¹. Empty farms in the Klaipėda Region existed as late as at the beginning of 50s of the 20th century, when in the process of the organised transfer of population from Eastern and Southeastern Lithuania in 1951–1955, part of them were accommodated in the collective farms established in the Klaipėda Region⁵². The former owners of the houses were either turned out of their homes or accepted as lodgers. “In the month of October 1944 we were driven to the heart of Germany by German authorities, and in May 1945, the Red Army liberated us, and we returned to our homeland. As I returned, I found my farm occupied by a new settler Bauža who had moved from the Tauragė County. When I asked to give me a room temporarily in my house, they disagreed and turned me out of my yard. So I could not return to my home and am still living at other people’s place in the village of Krauleidžiai, the rural district of Katyčiai”⁵³.

The situation of repatriates was not much better in the city of Klaipėda, due to the lack of houses suitable for accommodation and normal living conditions, water supply, sewerage, or sanitary units; those living in the *Viktorija* Hotel were dropping their garbage through the window, and the yards were filthy⁵⁴. In the Pagėgiai camp, 215 people were accommodated, mostly former German citizens who after 1945 had wandered into the Klaipėda Region from the region of Karaliaučius⁵⁵. In 1950, it was stated that “the inhabitants of the camp do not look like human beings, shabby and dirty. They live only from begging”, and dysentery often raged there⁵⁶.

⁴⁹ N. Kairiūkštytė, *Klaipėdos krašto repatriantai ir jų padėtis 1945–1950 m.*, p. 44.

⁵⁰ The answer by the Head of the Department of General Affairs of the Pagėgiai County Executive Committee to Dilbienė Iga, Kiupeliai Village of Katyčiai County, 1948 03 01. LCVA, f. R–754, ap. 4, b. 1594, l. 7.

⁵¹ N. Kairiūkštytė, op. cit., p. 44.

⁵² For more details, see: V. Stravinskienė, *Gyventojų perkėlimo akcija iš Rytų ir Pietryčių Lietuvos 1951–1955 metais*, Lituanistica, 2010, t. 56, nr 1–4 (79–82), pp. 42–56.

⁵³ Statement of Bušinskas Martynas, residing in the village of Krauleidžiai, Katyčiai Rural District, Pagėgiai County, 15 March 1948, to the Department of Repatriation Affairs and to the Head of the Council of Ministers of the Lithuanian SSR Comrade Slavin. LCVA, f. R–754, ap. 4, b. 1549, l. 16.

⁵⁴ Resolution of the Executive Committee of the Working People Deputies’ Council of Klaipėda *On the Sanitary Status of the Hotel Victoria*, 1950 12 08. LCVA, f. R–754, ap. 4, b. 2535, l. 101.

⁵⁵ Those are mainly the so-called *wolf children* whose experiences and histories after 1945 do not belong to the field of our research.

⁵⁶ A Statement of Inspector Eidukaitis of the Repatriation and Transfer Centre of the Klaipėda County Executive Committee to the Head of the Department of Repatriation Affairs at the Council of Ministers of the Lithuanian SSR Comrade Slavin. 1950. LCVA, f. R–754, ap. 4, b. 2535, l. 106.

The epilogue. Departure: „We also wanted to leave”

Although the chronological boundaries of the present research concentrate on 1951, when the great flows of repatriation ended, yet it is 1960 that could be regarded as a certain caesura of the existence of both repatriates and all Klaipedians in the Klaipėda Region, since, based on the agreement of the Federal Republic of Germany and the Soviet Union signed on 9 April 1958, about 6,000 Klaipedians left the Klaipėda Region for Germany in the period of 1958–1960⁵⁷. According to Ruth Kibelka, the return home had been very important for repatriates, and the “homeland meant everything for them”, however, in the later years they discovered that “the homeland was no longer a homeland”⁵⁸. Their new life, just as the life of other indigenous inhabitants of the region, on their own/alien land became complicated, “because we were hated, not only Lithuanians hated us, but also Russians [...]. We were hated by everyone [...]. People of the Klaipėda Region, who needed them”⁵⁹. The collective farms, the fear of “deportation to Siberia”⁶⁰, the change in the atmosphere of the region, as “after the war, it was only *schnaps* and nothing more”⁶¹, and totally alien people around did not provide Klaipedians with a sense of security in their homeland. The Protestant Church which had predominated in the Region for several centuries suffered particularly great losses and devastation. Until the great historical turning point in 1944–1945, the Klaipėda Region boasted 31 Evangelical Lutheran parishes, while in the postwar years, just a few Evangelical Lutheran churches remained functioning: the vast majority of them were closed, destroyed, or turned into warehouses or cinemas. However, even in those few active Protestant churches, the local Klaipedians did not always feel safe, as the churches were intended to be closed or turned into Catholic houses of faith: “As the Saugai [the present Šilutė district–S.P.] parishioners were preparing for worship in their own church, at the same time Catholics who had arrived from Lithuania Major intended to take over the Evangelical churches of the Saugai Parish for their own needs.” Following a sharp debate outside the church between Protestants and Catholics, the Catholics went away at the time, and the Protestants could hold a service, nevertheless, all over the Soviet times, the Protestants felt tension about their confession of faith, which for them meant the destruction of the most essential identity of their community. Therefore, it was evident that “poverty, constrained rights, and

⁵⁷ R. Kibelka, *Memelland. Fünf Jahrzehnte Nachkriegsgeschichte*, Berlin 2002, pp. 83, 227.

⁵⁸ Ibidem, p. 85.

⁵⁹ Memories of a man born in 1937 [IS08_VLN_VL1937vt]. The database of the RCL-funded project *Klaipėda Region 1945–1960: the Formation of a New Society and its Reflections in Family Stories*

⁶⁰ Ibidem.

⁶¹ U. Lachauer, *Rojaus kelias. Rytprūsių ūkininkės Lėnės Grigolaitytės prisiminimai*, Vilnius 2001, p. 63.

frequently experienced scorn were pushing” Klaipedians to Germany⁶², in which, as evidenced by at least some fragmentary contacts with the relatives already living there, the life from the political and economic viewpoint was better⁶³.

After the agreement between the FRG and the USSR had been signed, the main concern of Klaipedians who wanted to leave for Germany was to provide documents proving that “they had been born in East Prussia or the Klaipėda Region and had had German citizenship on 21 June 1941”, and their “spouses and children had acquired the German citizenship before 21 June 1941”⁶⁴. Even though the departure to Germany meant the loss of homeland, “we also wanted to leave. However, why we never left, [even though] the documents were sent, [still] it took a lot of money. And we had no money.”⁶⁵ Others were prevented from leaving by the lack of documents: “Mom did not have any documents for herself. Dad had all the documents, however, he was no longer alive [in 1951 – S.P.] All that Mom had were ration cards for clothes [of the Second World War – S.P.] and nothing else. And if you had no documents, you could do or prove nothing”⁶⁶, and the most important documents had been lost during the retreat in 1944–1945⁶⁷. Despite the hindrances, about 6,000 Klaipedians took the chance to leave, provided by the agreement, and went to Germany. “After 1958, in Bitėnai [the present Pagėgiai Municipality] and in its environs, we were the only ones who had lived there before the war. All the others collected the documents and left. Once, a full carriage of people left for Germany”⁶⁸. The local Klaipedians who stayed finally adapted to the current situation and integrated into the Soviet society.

Conclusions

To sum up, one can argue that the changes that took place after the Second World War had the greatest impact on the former territory of East Prussia, which had been divided into three parts and had lost the majority of its population by the end of the war. Among the postwar population of the Klaipėda Region, the repatriates, indigenous inhabitants of the Region who had come back to their homeland from the German oc-

⁶² K. Kaukas, *Rausvos pamarių rasos*, Klaipėda 1995, p. 103.

⁶³ S. Safronovas, *Apie repatriaciją ir Lietuvoje vyraujančią požiūrį į Klaipėdos krašto senbuvių*, Kultūros barai, 2010, nr 6, p. 10.

⁶⁴ Ibidem, p. 12.

⁶⁵ Memories of a man born in 1930 [SP09_KLPK_ML1930vt]. The database of the RCL-funded project *Klaipėda Region 1945–1960: the Formation of a New Society and its Reflections in Family Stories*

⁶⁶ Memories of a man born in 1935 [SP07_KLPK_VL1935 vt]. The database of the RCL-funded project *Klaipėda Region 1945–1960: the Formation of a New Society and its Reflections in Family Stories*

⁶⁷ A letter of Kreszies. *Arbeitsgemeinschaft der Memelkreise in der Landsmannschaft Ostpreußen*, Oldenburg, 1959 11 17. AdM archyvas, 1607 25_0102.

⁶⁸ U. Lachauer, op. cit., p. 86.

cupational zones, mainly the Soviet one, accounted for the smallest group, however, its studies revealed the gruelling situation of that particular stratum in the Soviet period. Difficult adaptation to the new political system and the cultural and economic environment and challenging maintenance of the Protestant tradition in the atmosphere of atheistic ideology finally “returned” part of the postwar repatriates back to Germany in 1958–1960, while the rest of the Klaipedians had to adapt to the current political situation and to become part of the new society of the Klaipėda Region.

Silva Pocyte, *Populacja okręgu kłajpedzkiego po 1945 roku: przypadek repatriantów*

Streszczenie

Celem niniejszego artykułu jest omówienie sytuacji repatriantów z okręgu kłajpedzkiego w okresie pierwszych lat powojennych, w oparciu zarówno o publikowane wcześniej, jak i niepublikowane wspomnienia mieszkańców oraz dokumenty archiwalne. Chronologiczne granice podjętych tu badań spinają lata 1945–1951. Przyjrzymy się sytuacji w jakiej znalazła się ludność powracająca do okręgu kłajpedzkiego z niemieckich stref okupacyjnych.

Sytuacja repatriantów po 1945 roku była integralną częścią procesów demograficznych zachodzących w rejonie Kłajpedy w ciągu kilku kolejnych lat powojennych. Należy jednak zauważyć, że nadal brakuje kompletnych badań nad ludnością tego obszaru w owym czasie, w tym przyczynami przemieszczania się, składem społecznym i etnicznym nowej populacji oraz stosunkami pomiędzy nowymi osadnikami a zamieszkującymi region nielicznymi autochtonami.

Trudny związane z dostosowaniem się do nowego systemu politycznego, nowego klimatu kulturowego i gospodarczego, problemami z pielęgnowaniem tradycji protestanckiej w realiach promowania postaw ateistycznych, wszystko wpłynęło na to, że część powojennych repatriantów w latach 1958–1963 „powróciło” ostatecznie do Niemiec. Ci co pozostali musieli dopasować się do istniejącej sytuacji politycznej i stać się częścią nowego społeczeństwa Regionu Kłajpedy.

Tłumaczenie Seweryn Szczepański

Silva Pocyte, *Die Bevölkerung des Kreises Klaipėda nach 1945: der Fall der Repatriierten*

Zusammenfassung

Das Ziel des vorliegenden Beitrags ist die Besprechung der Situation der Repatriierten aus dem Kreis Klaipėda in den ersten Nachkriegsjahren in Anlehnung an sowohl bereits publizierte und noch unveröffentlichte Erinnerungen der Bewohner des Landes als auch an die Archivdokumente. Die zeitliche Zäsur der durchgeführten Forschungen betrifft Jahre 1945–1951. Wir sollen genau anschauen, wie die Situation der Bevölkerung war, die in den Kreis Klaipėda aus den deutschen Besatzungsgebieten zurückkehrte.

Die Situation von Repatriierten nach 1945 gehörte zu demographischen Prozessen im Klaipėda-Gebiet in den ersten Nachkriegsjahren. Man muss bedenken, dass es weiterhin an vollständigen Forschungen zur Bevölkerungsgeschichte dieser Region in der genannten Zeit fehlt, dieser Mangel betrifft auch Migrationsgründe, gesellschaftliche und ethnische Struktur neuer Bewohner, darüber hinaus auch Beziehungen zwischen den neuen Ansiedlern und den wenigen hier gebliebenen Einheimischen.

Die Bemühungen, sich an neues politisches System, neues kulturelles und wirtschaftliches Klima anzupassen, die Probleme mit der Pflege der protestantischen Tradition in der Situation der Beförderung der atheistischen Haltung, all das hatte Einfluss darauf, dass ein Teil der Nachkriegsrepatriierten in den Jahren 1958–1963 endgültig nach Deutschland „zurückkehrte”. Diejenigen, die hier geblieben sind, mussten sich an die damalige politische Situation anpassen und einen Teil der neuen Gesellschaft des Klaipėda-Gebietes bilden.

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