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**«THE EXODUS FROM THE “HOUSE OF SLAVERY”:  
THE REPATRIATION OF LITHUANIAN JEWS FROM SOVIET  
UKRAINE IN THE EARLY 1920s**

**Abstract**

**Purpose** – to analyze the repatriation of Lithuanian Jews from Soviet Ukraine in the early 1920s, identifying its scale, key features, and obstacles. **Methodology** is based on the analysis of archival materials from Soviet institutions, combining an institutional approach with microhistorical examination of individual cases. The **novelty** lies in reconstructing the repatriation process using previously underutilized archival sources and demonstrating its instrumental role in state policy, which contributed to the marginalization of Jewish refugees. **Conclusions.** Over 65,000 refugees from Lithuania were present in Soviet Ukraine, more than two-thirds of them Jews; about 25,000–30,000 were repatriated in 1921–1922, including 17,000–20,000 Jews. The process served state interests rather than humanitarian aims.

**Keywords:** repatriation, Jews, Lithuania, Lithuanian Jews, World War I refugees, Soviet Ukraine, Ukrholovevak.

**Problem statement.** Simon Dubnov, a prominent historian, publicist, and one of the founding figures of modern Jewish historiography, described his long and arduous departure from Bolshevik Russia in the early 1920s as «an exodus from the house of slavery.» These words aptly capture the experience of Lithuanian Jews who, having found themselves in Ukraine during the First World War, sought to return home.

In 1914–1915, more than 300,000 people (Makauskas, Černius, 2018, 277) were displaced from Lithuania to the rear regions of the Russian Empire. While much of the Christian population fled the advancing front or was evacuated by the authorities, Jews, whom the tsarist regime groundlessly suspected of sympathizing with Germany, became victims of forced mass deportations and expulsions. The Jewish population of the Kovno province suffered particularly severely, with the peak of deportations occurring in early May 1915.

Simon Dubnov himself recorded these events in his diary: «May 5. The horrors continue. Jews are being expelled from Kovno and Poniewież... May 7. An open official campaign is underway with the infernal aim of blaming the Jews for military defeats... May 10. The terror intensifies. Mad and criminal acts are being committed. Tens of thousands of Jews were expelled from Kovno and the

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province on a single day (May 5). The order of the army commander, published today, mandates the total expulsion of Jews... and their exile to the Poltava and Katerynoslav provinces. The unfortunate exiles were placed in cattle cars. They asked, “Where are we being taken?” and were told, “Wherever it is ordered...”» (Dubnov, 1998, 348).

According to Naftali Friedman, a member of the Fourth State Duma, approximately 150,000 Jews (Irchak, 2025, 186) were forcibly deported from the Kovno province alone. Deportations also took place in other Lithuanian provinces, including Suwałki and Vilnius.

The main destinations of deportation, alongside other rear regions of the Russian Empire, were the eastern and southeastern provinces of Ukraine: Poltava, Katerynoslav, Chernihiv, Kharkiv, and mainland Tavria. During the First World War, tens of thousands of natives of Lithuania, predominantly Jews were concentrated in these areas. The overwhelming majority sought to return home at the earliest opportunity.

In February–March 1918, the Treaties of Brest were concluded between the Central Powers and, first, the independent Ukrainian People’s Republic and later Soviet Russia. These agreements brought the war in Eastern Europe to an end and created the preconditions for large-scale repatriation. However, in the Ukrainian case, this process only became feasible somewhat later, after the conclusion of the two-year armed struggle among the various forces of the Ukrainian Revolution and the eventual establishment of Bolshevik rule over most of the territory.

The present study **is based on documents** from three Soviet Ukrainian state institutions responsible for refugee repatriation: the People’s Commissariat for Foreign Affairs, the People’s Commissariat for Internal Affairs, and the All-Ukrainian Commission for the Reevacuation of the Population. These materials are currently preserved in the Central State Archives of the Highest Bodies of Power and Administration of Ukraine in Kyiv (TsDAVO). Despite the openness and accessibility of these archives, the documents (aside from a few exceptions) have attracted little attention from both Ukrainian and foreign scholars.

The diplomatic and institutional history of this repatriation can be reconstructed from official correspondence between commissariats and plenipotentiary missions. But the experience of repatriation as it was actually lived (the searches, arrests, extortions, family separations, and border refusals) emerges only from a different layer of the archive: the petitions, complaints, and personal statements that individual refugees and their advocates addressed to Soviet and Lithuanian officials. These documents give voice to people absent from the diplomatic record. Reading the repatriation from below, through the crises of individuals rather than the calculations of states, reveals the human cost of a process that both governments described, in their official communications, as orderly and principled.

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Accordingly, **this paper aims** to examine the process of repatriation in the early 1920s of Lithuanian Jews who had been forcibly deported to Ukrainian provinces by the tsarist authorities during the First World War. It seeks to identify the key features of this process, as well as the challenges encountered in its implementation. An additional objective is to establish quantitative indicators, including the total number of refugees from Lithuania in Soviet Ukraine, the proportion of Jews among them, and the number of individuals who ultimately returned to Lithuania.

The repatriation of Lithuanian Jews from Soviet Ukraine in the early 1920s sits at the intersection of several established **historiographical fields**, yet it has not previously been the subject of dedicated research. The present article draws on and contributes to four bodies of scholarship: the wartime displacement of Jews in the Russian Empire; the broader refugee crisis of the First World War; Soviet nationality policy in the early 1920s; and the postwar reintegration of displaced populations in the Baltic States.

The wartime origins of the population examined in this article are well documented. Eric Lohr's foundational article «The Russian Army and the Jews: Mass Deportation, Hostages, and Violence during World War I» (Lohr, 2001) established the tsarist military's deportation campaign against Jews as a deliberate policy instrument rather than mere wartime contingency, and his subsequent monograph «Nationalizing the Russian Empire» (Lohr, 2003) situated Jewish deportations within a broader imperial project of demographic «nationalization» that uprooted close to a million civilians. Polly Zavadiivker's «A Nation of Refugees: Russia's Jews in World War I» (Zavadiivker, 2024) provides the most comprehensive account to date of the Jewish refugee experience within the Russian Empire from 1914 to 1918, recovering individual voices largely absent from earlier scholarship. The wartime experience of Lithuanian Jews themselves has been further illuminated by Iryna Irchak's article «A “Compact Mass of Internal Enemies”: Situation of Lithuanian Jews during World War I Based on Naftali Fridman's Materials» (Irchak, 2025) which, drawing on contemporary testimonies, highlights how tsarist authorities constructed Jews as a collective security threat and subjected them to systematic deportations, surveillance, and discrimination, thereby deepening our understanding of the origins and conditions of displacement that shaped the refugee population examined in this article. Where Zavadiivker's and Irchak's narratives end, at the close of the war, the present article begins.

The broader context of wartime displacement has been shaped by Peter Gatrell's «A Whole Empire Walking: Refugees in Russia during World War I» (Gatrell, 1999), which remains the essential reference for the scale and social meanings of refugeedom before and after the tsarist collapse, and by the collective volume «Europe on the Move: Refugees in the Era of the Great War», co-edited by Gatrell and Liubov Zhvanko (Gatrell, Zhvanko, 2017). Zhvanko's monograph

«Bizhentsi Pershoi svitovoi viiny: Ukrainskyi vymir» (Zhvanko, 2012) constitutes the principal Ukrainian-language study of the refugee crisis on Ukrainian territory during the war years, and her statistical calculations for the end of 1920 provide the baseline figures deployed in this article. However, neither Zhvanko nor any other scholar has examined what happened to Lithuanian refugees who remained on Soviet Ukrainian territory after 1920, or under what conditions they were or were not able to return home.

The Soviet Ukrainian context requires engagement with two further bodies of scholarship. Brendan McGeever's «Antisemitism and the Russian Revolution» (McGeever, 2019) documents the persistence of anti-Jewish violence within Soviet institutions during the revolutionary period, providing background for understanding the environment in which Lithuanian Jewish refugees found themselves as repatriation commenced. The predatory behavior of Soviet officials documented in the present article represents a continuation into the NEP period of the dynamics McGeever traces in 1917–1921.

The Lithuanian dimension has received less attention in the anglophone literature. Available data suggest that among the 69,728 refugees who returned to Lithuania in 1921, Jews constituted approximately 37 percent and ethnic Lithuanians 42 percent (Balkelis, 2003, 455, note 75), figures that complement and partially corroborate the Ukrainian archival data presented here, while raising important questions about how dramatically these proportions shifted as Lithuanian gatekeeping intensified after 1921.

Taken together, this scholarship establishes the wartime origins of Lithuania's Jewish refugee population, documents the violence they endured in Ukraine, and sketches the Soviet and Lithuanian policy frameworks within which repatriation occurred. What it does not provide is an archivally grounded account of the repatriation process itself as experienced on the ground in Soviet Ukraine – the diplomatic negotiations, the bureaucratic machinery, the scale and ethnic composition of departures, and the systematic obstacles that confronted Jewish refugees at every stage. It is this gap that the present article addresses.

**Presentation of the main material.** The Ukrainian Socialist Soviet Republic (Ukrainian SSR), with its capital in Kharkiv, concluded an alliance treaty with Soviet Russia in late December 1920 while formally retaining certain attributes of state sovereignty. In particular, it maintained its own government, the Council of People's Commissars, as well as a separate foreign policy institution, the People's Commissariat for Foreign Affairs. As a result, despite acting as a junior partner and generally following the Kremlin's political line, the Ukrainian SSR formally conducted independent diplomatic activity. It established relations with foreign states, concluded treaties, and exchanged plenipotentiary missions. One such partner was the Republic of Lithuania.

The peace treaty between Soviet Russia and Lithuania, signed in Moscow on July 12, 1920, provided the foundation for the development of Ukrainian–

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Lithuanian relations. It was on this basis that bilateral negotiations between Ukraine and Lithuania commenced in Moscow in late 1920. The Ukrainian delegation included prominent Bolsheviks Felix Kohn and Yuriy Kotsiubynsky, while the Lithuanian side was represented by Jurgis Baltrušaitis, Juozas Vanagas Simonaitis, Rafalas Jodelis, and Kazys Švydas.

One of the central, if not the most important, issues addressed during these negotiations was the return of refugees to their homeland. Accordingly, on January 28, 1921, the parties signed two key documents: the Agreement on the Procedure for the Option of Lithuanian Citizenship and the Temporary Rules on the Transportation by Railways and Means of the Ukrainian SSR of Property of Lithuanian Refugees during Their Re-evacuation from the Ukrainian SSR until the Conditions of Transportation Change.

Under the first agreement, all Lithuanians, as well as natives of Lithuania of other nationalities, were granted the right to acquire Lithuanian citizenship, provided that they or their parents had been permanent residents of territories belonging to the Republic of Lithuania. Optants were required to leave the Ukrainian SSR within one year and to take their property with them in accordance with the provisions of the second document (Ukrainska RSR, 1966, 235–238).

The Temporary Rules established strict limitations on the amount of property that could be transported. The total weight of luggage (excluding hand luggage) was limited to 10 poods (164.8 kg) for the head of a family, 6 poods (98.2 kg) for each adult family member, and 3 poods (49.1 kg) for children under the age of ten. A separate article specified items prohibited from export, including: unauthorized documents, papers, and photographs; weapons; goods intended for trade (such as textiles, leather goods, and haberdashery); food exceeding 40 pounds (18.1 kg) per person; livestock and poultry; vehicles of all kinds; unprocessed precious stones; gold and platinum items exceeding 16 zolotniks (68.2 g), as well as silver items exceeding 1 pound (409.5 g); items containing precious stones over 1 carat; industrial machinery and equipment (except tools necessary for professional activity); soap and tobacco beyond prescribed limits; cash exceeding 100,000 rubles per person; as well as foreign currency, securities, and objects of artistic or antique value without special authorization (TsDAVO, f. 4, op. 1, spr. 661, ark. 15).

These agreements were followed, on February 14, 1921, by the Peace Treaty between Ukraine and Lithuania (Ukrainska RSR, 1966, 241–246) and the Treaty on the Re-evacuation of Refugees (Ukrainska RSR, 1966, 239–241). In addition to political provisions, the Peace Treaty explicitly affirmed the right to opt for Lithuanian or Ukrainian citizenship (Article IV) and emphasized the need for the prompt return of refugees to their homes (Article V) (Ukrainska RSR, 1966, 243).

The subsequent Treaty on the Re-evacuation of Refugees elaborated the conditions and procedures of repatriation in greater detail. It defined refugees as «citizens of both Contracting Parties who previously resided in the territory of one

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of them and are now in the territory of the other, having left during the World War of 1914–1917 the areas occupied or threatened by the enemy, or having been evacuated by order of military or civilian authorities from the zone of hostilities» (Article II) (Ukrainska RSR, 1966, 240). Refugees were entitled to take their property in accordance with the previously adopted Temporary Rules (Article IV) (Ukrainska RSR, 1966, 241).

The treaty also established the general procedure for re-evacuation (Article III). Refugees were to be transported to transfer points in organized echelons or individual railway cars, while movement to assembly points could occur either in groups or individually. The number of refugees to be transported was to be determined separately. The sending party was responsible for compiling lists of refugees and assigning them to echelons, while the receiving party verified these lists. Each party bore the costs of transportation within its own territory (Ukrainska RSR, 1966, 240). To facilitate implementation and resolve disputes, both sides appointed plenipotentiary representatives (Article VI) (Ukrainska RSR, 1966, 241). Lithuania designated Vytautas Mošinskis, a mechanical engineer and professor at the Kharkiv Institute of Technology, as its commissioner for re-evacuation in Soviet Ukraine (TsDAVO, f. 4, op. 1, spr. 38, ark. 22).

As is evident, considerable attention was devoted to the issue of refugee return. As the head of the government of Soviet Ukraine, Christian Rakovsky noted, «the question of general repatriation is one of the main motivations» for Lithuania (as well as for Latvia and Estonia) «to negotiate with us; otherwise, such negotiations would lose their significance» (TsDAVO, f. 4, op. 1, spr. 728, ark. 6).

Within the Ukrainian SSR, refugee affairs were administered by the All-Ukrainian Main Commission for the Re-evacuation of the Population (Ukrholovevak), established on April 24, 1920 (Shcherov, 2000, 40). Although Soviet Ukraine was formally a sovereign state, the Commission's personnel were appointed from Moscow. Its primary task was to determine the precise number of refugees, including Lithuanian Jews, and to ensure their registration, a process that proved both lengthy and complex due to a range of practical and administrative challenges. Due to the scarcity of sources and the limited scope of existing research, the exact number of inhabitants of Lithuanian provinces who ended up in present-day Ukraine as refugees or deportees during the First World War remains unknown. Only approximate figures are available. According to calculations by Ukrainian historian Liubov Zhvanko, by the end of 1920 Lithuanian «refugees of the imperialist war», including Jews, were registered in several cities: Poltava (26,460), Luhansk (13,685), Kharkiv (12,310), Kremenchuk (4,010), Katerynoslav (3,002), Odesa (2,873), Chernihiv (2,100), Kyiv (683), Mykolaiv (643), and Kherson (178). This yields a minimum total of 65,944 individuals (Zhvanko, 2011, 90).

Six months later, the situation had changed somewhat. The number of refugees from Lithuania decreased, primarily as a result of the onset of the re-

evacuation process. As of July 13, 1921, 40,789 refugees from Lithuania, including Jews, were registered. Their distribution by region was as follows: Katerynoslav province – 7,750; Poltava – 1,897; Oleksandrivsk – 1,713; Kremenchuk – 798; Kyiv – 2,223; Podillya – 124; Volyn – 29; Kharkiv – 804; Donetsk – 14,916; Chernihiv – 1,850; Mykolaiv and Kherson – 6,900; and Crimea – 1,785 (TsDAVO, f. 4, op. 1, spr. 662, ark. 45).

Over time, as repatriation progressed, the number of Lithuanian refugees in Ukraine continued to decline steadily. In July–August 1922, the Lithuanian plenipotentiary mission reviewed and certified refugee lists compiled in various cities. These documents recorded a total of 5,842 individuals, of whom 4,047 were removed for various reasons, leaving only 1,795 ultimately approved (TsDAVO, f. 4, op. 1, spr. 884, ark. 189). Those excluded were predominantly non-Lithuanian refugees (Jews, Russians, and others), who were subjected to additional and often excessive documentation requirements that they were unable to meet, and were therefore not included in the lists for transportation (TsDAVO, f. 4, op. 1, spr. 884, ark. 179).

An important issue concerns the number of Lithuanian refugees who were actually repatriated from the Ukrainian SSR. Based on available documentation, it is possible to offer at least an approximate estimate, which helps to illustrate the scale of the process. During initial consultations in March 1921, the Soviet side promised the Lithuanian commissioner that four trains, each carrying approximately 1,000 people, would be dispatched monthly. However, this figure was soon reduced to two trains per month. Consequently, the Lithuanian side expected that at least 4,000 refugees would be repatriated during April–May 1921. In practice, only about one-third of this target was achieved. By mid-May, only one echelon of slightly more than 1,000 people had departed from Kharkiv (the so-called 1<sup>st</sup> Kharkiv Echelon). In addition, 16 railway cars carrying nearly 400 refugees from Mariupol were attached to a regular train; these departures were organized independently by local authorities without coordination with Ukrholovevak (TsDAVO, f. 4, op. 1, spr. 663, ark. 1).

Subsequently, during June and the first half of July 1921, a further 2,800 refugees were transported in four echelons: two from Kharkiv (the Second and Third Kharkiv Echelons), one from Bakhmut, and one from Odesa (TsDAVO, f. 336, op. 3, spr. 25, ark. 26).

Altogether, according to Ukrholovevak data, 16,870 refugees were sent to Lithuania between January 1 and November 1, 1921 (TsDAVO, f. 4, op. 1, spr. 728, ark. 3). It is also known that in the first nine months of 1922, an additional 4,154 Lithuanian refugees passed through the organization's regional branches (TsDAVO, f. 336, op. 3, spr. 25, ark. 3). Thus, between May 1921 and September 1922, at least 21,000 individuals were repatriated from the territory of the Ukrainian SSR to Lithuania.

At the end of 1922, it was officially announced that the re-evacuation of Lithuanian refugees, including Jews, from Ukraine and Crimea would be suspended until the following spring. According to Soviet press reports, only a small number of Lithuanian refugees remained in the Ukrainian SSR at that time. In October, approximately 1,200 refugees from the Donetsk province, around 300 from the Kyiv province, as well as smaller groups from Crimea and other regions, were scheduled for repatriation. In several provinces (notably Poltava, Kremenchuk, and Katerynoslav) the process was nearly complete. Similarly, the removal of Lithuanian refugees from Kharkiv had almost been finalized (TsDAVO, f. 5, op. 1, spr. 1008, ark. 10). In December, Soviet newspapers reported the departure of the last extraordinary echelon from Kharkiv, carrying 50–60 individuals who had, for various reasons, missed earlier transports. This group was to be joined by an additional 89 refugees from the Donbas region. By the end of the month, the final echelons from the Kyiv (over 300 people) and Chernihiv (approximately 650 people) provinces were scheduled to depart for Lithuania (TsDAVO, f. 5, op. 1, spr. 1008, ark. 50). Following these transports, the repatriation process was officially declared complete.

Although these figures are not exhaustive, it is unlikely to be a significant exaggeration to suggest that by the end of 1922 (during the active phase of repatriation) approximately 25,000 to 30,000 Lithuanian refugees had returned home. While the broader process of repatriating foreign nationals continued for approximately two more years, until early 1925, its intensity declined sharply. Consequently, the number of individuals leaving the Ukrainian SSR for Lithuania during this later period was relatively small and did not substantially affect the overall statistics.

In Soviet documentation, all these individuals were classified as «Lithuanians» based on their state affiliation rather than their ethnic identity. This raises an important and quite logical question: what was the actual ethnic composition of refugees from the Lithuanian provinces? Specifically, how many among them were ethnic Lithuanians, Jews, Poles, Russians, or Belarusians? Owing to the scarcity of sources, a complete picture remains elusive. Nevertheless, on the basis of selected registration lists, it is possible to formulate certain assumptions and propose a working hypothesis.

For instance, in the city of Cherkasy (Kyiv province) in 1921, of the 96 Lithuanian refugees registered for re-evacuation, 76% (73 individuals) were Jews, 15.5% (15 individuals) were Russians of the Orthodox faith, and only 8.5% (8 individuals) were Lithuanians, Catholics, or Lutherans (TsDAVO, f. 336, op. 1, spr. 593, ark. 1–19). A similar pattern can be observed in Kremenchuk: in October 1921, 91.7% (397 individuals) of registered refugees were Jews, 4.6% (20 individuals) were Russians, and only 3.7% (16 individuals) were Lithuanians (TsDAVO, f. 336, op. 1, spr. 607, ark. 17–34).

A major center of concentration for Lithuanian refugees was Kharkiv, then the capital of Soviet Ukraine. In 1921, five echelons of repatriates departed from the city (referred to in documents as the 1st through 5th Kharkiv echelons). The first echelon, dispatched in the second half of May, included 1,102 individuals: Jews accounted for 69% (764 people), Lithuanians for 27% (298 people), Poles for 2.9% (32 people), and Russians for 0.6% (7 people) (TsDAVO, f. 4, op. 1, spr. 138, ark. 1–27).

The second echelon departed in mid-June with 890 individuals, of whom Jews comprised 64.7% (576 people), Lithuanians 20.1% (179 people), Poles 7.2% (64 people), Russians 6.6% (59 people), Karaites 1.23% (11 people), and others 0.17% (1 person) (TsDAVO, f. 5, op. 1, spr. 540, ark. 1–22).

The third echelon followed shortly thereafter, in the second half of June, carrying 526 passengers, of whom Jews accounted for 70% (368 people), Lithuanians 29.7% (156 people), and others 0.3% (2 people) (TsDAVO, f. 5, op. 1, spr. 534, ark. 1–13).

The fourth echelon departed in the second half of July and included 1,408 individuals: Jews constituted 61.3% (863 people), Lithuanians 33.1% (466 people), Poles 2.55% (36 people), Karaites 1.42% (20 people), Germans 1.06% (15 people), and Russians and Ukrainians 0.57% (8 people) (TsDAVO, f. 5, op. 1, spr. 536, ark. 1–29).

In late August 1921, the first echelon of Lithuanian refugees departed from Katerynoslav, carrying 1,209 individuals, of whom 778 (64.4%) were Jews (TsDAVO, f. 5, op. 1, spr. 1042, ark. 1–21). Particularly striking is the case of a separate group of refugees transported from Mariupol to Kharkiv for further repatriation: all 399 individuals in this contingent were Jews (TsDAVO, f. 4, op. 1, spr. 138, ark. 29–37).

The data presented above allow us to conclude with a high degree of confidence that in 1921 at least two-thirds of the so-called «Lithuanian refugees» (often referred to in Soviet documents simply as «Lithuanians») were in fact Jews by ethnicity and religion. Only approximately one-third were ethnic Lithuanians.

The predominance of Jews among the re-evacuated refugees can be explained by both objective and subjective factors. On the one hand, Jews indeed constituted the largest group among the «Lithuanian refugees» of the First World War, largely as a result of the explicitly anti-Semitic deportation policies of the tsarist regime. On the other hand, the Soviet authorities in the Ukrainian SSR also had practical incentives to prioritize their repatriation.

A significant proportion of Jewish refugees belonged to socially vulnerable categories – elderly individuals, women, children, and persons with disabilities. Adult men were often unable to provide for their families, as many were poor artisans, small traders, laborers, or individuals without stable occupations. In the context of widespread unemployment, economic devastation, famine, and severe inflation, the state lacked the capacity to provide adequate support. On the

contrary, maintaining such populations imposed a considerable financial burden and contributed to social tension.

This interpretation is supported by a telegram sent on January 19, 1921, by the Council of People's Commissars of the Ukrainian SSR to the head of the All-Ukrainian Central Executive Committee, Hryhorii Petrovskiy: «On behalf of Rakovsky, I inform you that only the disabled, the seriously ill, those under 16 and over 50, single women with children, and demobilized Red Army soldiers of these nationalities are being released to their homeland» (TsDAVO, f. 4, op. 1, spr. 728, ark. 6). Thus, the Soviet authorities did not intend to allow all refugees to leave quickly or freely. As is well known, refugees also served as a political instrument, effectively functioning as leverage in negotiations with the Baltic States.

Initially, therefore, Jews overwhelmingly predominated among Lithuanian refugees. However, over time, this pattern began to change significantly: the proportion of ethnic Lithuanians increased, while that of Jews declined rapidly. This shift is clearly illustrated by the departure lists of the third and fourth Odesa echelons, which left in July–August 1922. In the former, Jews accounted for exactly 40% (138 individuals) of 345 passengers (TsDAVO, f. 5, op. 1, spr. 1044, ark. 1–12), while in the latter they comprised 34.1% (88 individuals) of 240 (TsDAVO, f. 5, op. 1, spr. 1045, ark. 1–12). Another example further demonstrates this trend: at the end of December 1922, 186 individuals awaiting departure in Kyiv included 93.1% Lithuanians (174 people), 4.6% Jews (8 people), and 2.3% others (4 people).

The principal reason for these rapid changes lay in the selective policy pursued by the Lithuanian commissioner for re-evacuation, who, during the review of departure lists, created artificial obstacles for non-Lithuanians. As a result, the overwhelming majority of Jews, as well as many Russians, Poles, and others originating from Lithuanian territories, were ultimately unable to return to their homeland.

For example, in June 1922, the Lithuanian commissioner reviewed repatriation lists comprising 3,045 individuals, yet only 868 of them (28.5%) were granted entry visas. Even members of the same family were often excluded: spouses were separated, parents were forced to leave without some or all of their children, siblings were divided, and both young children and elderly, frail individuals were left without care. The Lithuanian commissioner justified these decisions by claiming that refugees frequently attempted to present unrelated individuals as family members, or that their documentation was incomplete, irregular, or bore signs of falsification or alteration (TsDAVO, f. 4, op. 1, spr. 817, ark. 317). Thus, while the Soviet authorities sought, as far as possible, to facilitate the departure of impoverished and socially vulnerable Jewish refugees, the Lithuanian side, by contrast, employed various mechanisms to restrict their entry into Lithuania.

A markedly different dynamic emerged in the case of refugees possessing specialized skills (such as engineers, physicians, or pharmacists) whose expertise was in short supply in both the Ukrainian SSR and Lithuania. While the Lithuanian authorities were interested in securing the return of as many such specialists as possible, the Soviet side often attempted to retain them by various administrative means and under different pretexts.

It was not uncommon for the heads of institutions employing refugees to deliberately reassign individuals already registered for re-evacuation, and awaiting departure, to other, often remote, locations. For instance, in May 1921, the People's Commissariat of Health forcibly transferred Dr. E. Kassel from Kharkiv to Bakhmut. In response to protests by the Lithuanian commissioner, Soviet officials argued that «the fact of registration cannot serve as grounds for dismissal from employment and, consequently, for exemption from official assignments; it is necessary to provide proof of inclusion in the next echelon» (TsDAVO, f. 4, op. 1, spr. 754, ark. 33).

Similarly, the chief physician of the Kremenchuk military hospital categorically refused to release the resident Abram Keilzon from service, citing the need to obtain special authorization from Moscow, specifically from the Main Sanitary Administration. In protesting this decision, the Lithuanian commissioner, Professor Vytautas Mošinskis, observed that «the complications surrounding the re-evacuation of refugee specialists, which may appear formal, in practice render their right to return to their homeland a complete fiction» (TsDAVO, f. 4, op. 1, spr. 754, ark. 379).

Significant difficulties also arose for Jewish refugees who had been mobilized into the ranks of the Red Army during the revolutionary period of 1917–1921. In order to return home, they first had to be formally discharged from military service, a requirement that proved extremely difficult to fulfill in practice. This was often due to the reluctance of military commanders, who, despite the legal grounds for repatriation, continued to regard such individuals as their subordinates.

Archival records contain numerous petitions for discharge submitted both by the soldiers themselves and by their family members. For example, in early July 1921, Sarah Zif, a resident of Rogola in the Kovno province, who had been registered for repatriation, appealed to the Lithuanian re-evacuation commissioner requesting the release of her «only son capable of work.» Her son, Hershko, had been mobilized into the Red Army in 1920 and was serving in Proskuriv in the food administration. Sarah Zif emphasized that he had been her sole means of support and that, as a poor seventy-year-old widow, she was «unable to earn even a piece of bread on her own» (TsDAVO, f. 4, op. 1, spr. 754, ark. 180).

A similar situation was faced by Isak Shapiro, a resident of Svetsiansy and a dental technician serving in the dental department of the 886th Consolidated Reserve Field Hospital. Mobilized into the Red Army in 1919, he was not released

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from service «until a special order», despite having clear legal grounds for repatriation and official registration as a Lithuanian refugee (TsDAVO, f. 4, op. 1, spr. 754, ark. 224).

Selectivity and bias were defining features of Soviet policy in Ukraine toward Lithuanian refugees, including Jews. The lists of individuals eligible for repatriation were compiled and approved by a special Mixed Interdepartmental Commission. This body consisted exclusively of Soviet officials, representatives of the Special Department of the People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs, the Extraordinary Commission for Combating Counterrevolution (Cheka), and the Ukrholovevak – as well as a nominal «Lithuanian representative» who, in fact, had no connection to the government of the Republic of Lithuania. This role was typically performed by members of Lithuanian sections within the agitation and propaganda departments of provincial Communist Party committees.

The decisions of this commission were often arbitrary and biased, frequently contradicting the provisions of the Ukrainian–Lithuanian agreements on re-evacuation. They generated numerous complaints and protests. The commission displayed striking inconsistency: while some individuals were treated with undue leniency, others faced excessive scrutiny and discrimination.

In June 1921, the official Lithuanian commissioner for re-evacuation lodged a complaint regarding the commission's activities with the chairman of the Council of People's Commissars of the Ukrainian SSR, Christian Rakovsky. He noted, in particular: «1) This commission is extremely reluctant to include Lithuanians in the refugee lists, preferring refugees who are Jews, often not even Lithuanian citizens. 2) It categorically excludes indisputable refugees from Lithuania if they happen to belong to the intelligentsia (doctors, pharmacists, engineers), thereby directly violating the refugee treaty» (TsDAVO, f. 4, op. 1, spr. 663, ark. 20). According to Professor Vytautas Mošinskis, the Lithuanian commissioner, the Mixed Commission operated in a non-transparent manner, delayed the compilation and approval of repatriation lists, and systematically complicated the process of organizing departures. Such practices inevitably generated rumors, justified criticism, and numerous complaints from refugees (TsDAVO, f. 4, op. 1, spr. 663, ark. 20).

Mošinskis also made an important observation regarding the commission's procedures. While deliberately delaying the preparation and approval of departure lists, the commission simultaneously reduced the time allocated for the actual dispatch of echelons. As a result, all preparatory work had to be carried out in haste, leaving insufficient time for essential measures such as disinfection, smallpox vaccination, vacating living quarters, and most importantly obtaining permits for the export of personal property. Consequently, many refugees were unable to complete the necessary formalities in time and missed their assigned transport. To return home, they were forced to repeat the entire procedure from the beginning (TsDAVO, f. 4, op. 1, spr. 663, ark. 20).

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Jewish refugees from Lithuania who had been relocated to Ukrainian provinces found themselves at the epicenter of the revolutionary upheavals of 1917–1921. Like the local Jewish population, they suffered from pogroms, looting, and violence. Although a comprehensive statistical picture of these events remains unavailable, archival materials provide illustrative examples.

The port city of Mariupol in the Katerynoslav province (present-day Donetsk region), located on the Azov Sea, became a temporary refuge for many Jews, particularly those from Kovno and its surrounding province. In late March 1919, the city was seized by units of the 3rd Brigade of the 1st Zadniprovska Soviet Division under the command of the anarchist ataman Nestor Makhno. Shortly thereafter, in April, widespread looting occurred, affecting the civilian population, including Lithuanian Jewish refugees who had managed, over four years of residence, to establish livelihoods and even open small trading enterprises.

In March 1921, on the eve of repatriation, a group of twenty refugees submitted claims for lost property amounting to nearly 475,000 rubles in total (an average of 23,750 rubles per person) (TsDAVO, f. 4, op. 1, spr. 116). In addition to the Makhnovists, refugees also reported losses caused by Denikin's forces, which in October 1919 confiscated private property and transported it to Rostov for storage by the Russian Insurance Company, where it subsequently disappeared. Soviet authorities also carried out requisitions in 1920. However, the greatest losses were attributed to Makhno's troops. For instance, Shmuel Itsek Levin lost household goods and jewelry worth 200,000 rubles; Shmuel-Wolf Shar and Shimon Katz each lost property valued at 40,000 rubles; and Yakov Gutman was deprived of haberdashery goods and household items of similar value (TsDAVO, f. 4, op. 1, spr. 116, ark. 2, 4, 5, 14).

To better understand the magnitude of these losses, it is useful to consider contemporary prices in the neighboring city of Poltava: one pood (16 kg) of rye flour cost approximately 25,000 rubles, while ten eggs cost 2,500 rubles, and a pound of meat – 1,000 rubles (Nesvitskii, 1995, 203). In the context of the severe famine looming in southern Ukraine in the first half of 1921, food was literally worth its weight in gold. For further comparison, the monthly old-age pension paid to Lithuanian Jewish refugees by Soviet social welfare authorities amounted to approximately 1,500 rubles per individual and 3,000 rubles per family (TsDAVO, f. 4, op. 1, spr. 116, ark. 3, 14). Thus, a loss of 40,000 rubles was equivalent to roughly 26 months of an individual pension or 13 months of a family allowance.

The hardships experienced by Jewish refugees are vividly illustrated in a statement by F.S. Yakubson, an employee of the statistical and economic department of the Office of the Commissioner of the Council of People's Commissars of Ukraine for Foreign Trade. In July 1921, in an appeal to the Lithuanian diplomatic representative for re-evacuation, she wrote:

«In July 1914 we fled from Kovno and, after enduring five months of displacement and all the horrors of the World War, returned in the hope of securing

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at least a roof over our heads. However, the May 1915 order to expel all Jews from the frontline sent my family to Katerynoslav, a strange city, without relatives, friends, or means of subsistence. Over five years in Katerynoslav, we endured the full hardship of the Civil War and successive changes of power: Hryhoriv, Makhno, Petliura, and various partisan regimes. In the past year alone, we were robbed twice – by the troops of General Shkuro and by Makhno's forces. To this must be added that five out of ten members of my family suffer from tuberculosis, now in an advanced stage. My elderly parents, unable to adapt to new conditions, have been reduced to complete destitution and are incapable of work. Living in extreme hunger and constant fear may cost them their lives. Only a return to our homeland, where relatives remain, offers the hope of a more peaceful existence» (TsDAVO, f. 4, op. 1, spr. 754, ark. 232).

Soviet authorities also contributed to the dispossession of Lithuanian Jewish refugees. In a number of provinces, local administrations treated the movable property of refugees as subject to requisition. In Poltava province, for example, the Provincial Executive Committee issued a special resolution explicitly prohibiting refugees from removing their property (TsDAVO, f. 4, op. 1, spr. 754, ark. 17).

In mid-June 1921, local authorities in the city of Chuhuiv carried out large-scale searches targeting the wealthiest refugees and confiscated their valuables. Attempts to protest or file complaints were met with intimidation, including threats of arrest and exclusion from repatriation lists (TsDAVO, f. 4, op. 1, spr. 754, ark. 144–145). Despite repeated protests by the Lithuanian commissioner, this practice persisted. In November 1921, Professor Vytautas Mošinskis, in another appeal to the People's Commissariat for Foreign Affairs of the Ukrainian SSR, again reported «continuous searches, mainly in the provinces, accompanied by the seizure of belongings and money» (TsDAVO, f. 4, op. 1, spr. 754, ark. 428).

Such actions directly contradicted the provisions of the Ukrainian–Lithuanian agreement on the re-evacuation of refugees of February 14, 1921. In an effort to curb these abuses, the Lithuanian commissioner requested that the People's Commissariat for Foreign Affairs issue clear instructions to provincial, county, and municipal authorities, emphasizing that «the movable property of refugees from Lithuania is inviolable and, in accordance with paragraph IV of the agreement, may be removed or liquidated at the discretion of the refugees without hindrance» (TsDAVO, f. 4, op. 1, spr. 754, ark. 17).

It should be noted that such arbitrariness extended even to the lowest levels of administration. In some cases (particularly in Kharkiv) building commandants obstructed refugees from removing their personal belongings. In such instances, refugees appealed to the Lithuanian commissioner, who in turn addressed the Ukrainian authorities through diplomatic channels. While the People's Commissariat for Foreign Affairs transmitted corresponding instructions to the

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People's Commissariat of Internal Affairs, it remains unclear whether these directives were effectively implemented at the local level.

The case of the Lithuanian Jewish refugee Eliazar Rubinstein illustrates these difficulties. After registering for re-evacuation, his family was evicted from their apartment, which was to be converted into a dormitory for the Central Committee of the Communist Party. When Rubinstein attempted to move his furniture and household goods to another residence, the eviction commission prohibited him from doing so, declaring the items to be public property.

To resolve the matter, the People's Commissariat for Foreign Affairs appealed to a senior Bolshevik official, Central Committee secretary Felix Kohn, who stated that the furniture could be returned upon presentation of sufficient legal proof of ownership. In response, Rubinstein collected written testimonies from seven neighbors to confirm his claim (TsDAVO, f. 4, op. 1, spr. 754, ark. 27–28). However, it remains unknown whether this evidence ultimately led to the restitution of his property.

Refugees often found themselves in extremely vulnerable positions when forced to defend their property rights. A telling example is the case of Riva Kraut from the town of Glyboke in Vilnius province. In May 1921, her apartment in Kharkiv was burglarized, and all her belongings, including family gold weighing over 80 grams, were stolen. Although law enforcement authorities later recovered the stolen property, it was transferred to a people's judge, who refused to return it due to uncertainty regarding the legal status of refugee property.

Kraut found herself in dire circumstances: she had no other means of subsistence, was the sole breadwinner for her family, and supported a mentally ill husband and two minor children. Without her property, she risked being unable to return to Lithuania. Only after the intervention of the Lithuanian re-evacuation commissioner, who secured an official clarification from the People's Commissariat for Foreign Affairs, did the judge agree to return her belongings (TsDAVO, f. 4, op. 1, spr. 754, ark. 80).

At every stage of the repatriation process, Soviet authorities created additional obstacles for Jewish refugees. One widespread practice was the arbitrary arrest (without formal charges) of individuals who had already registered for re-evacuation, liquidated their property, and were awaiting departure. On the eve of leaving, they could suddenly find themselves imprisoned.

For instance, in the spring of 1921 in Kharkiv, Cheka officers arrested several Jewish refugees from Lithuania, including Borukh Sirota, Borukh Epel, and Israel Elkhones (TsDAVO, f. 4, op. 1, spr. 754, ark. 11–15, 29–30, 87–88). Fortunately, these individuals were able to appeal to the Lithuanian commissioner for re-evacuation. Owing to his intervention, and with the mediation of the People's Commissariat for Foreign Affairs of the Ukrainian SSR, they were eventually released.

In the autumn of 1921, Soviet authorities at the local level escalated their lawless practices even further, resorting to the arrest of Lithuanian refugees, including Jews, as hostages. For example, in late September in Poltava, several refugees were arrested without any legal grounds: physician Herman Goldberg, librarian Elana Kreichman, J. Milhiker, and surveyor Stanislav Lazarevich (TsDAVO, f. 4, op. 1, spr. 754, ark. 404). In October, additional arrests followed in Romny (including Khmelnytsky, Druzhilovsky, Tuchkevich, Pashkevich, and Wolf Kagan) and in Katerynoslav (Zelman, Khvoles, and Filipponis). In official records, the reason for these arrests was simply indicated as «hostage», a designation likewise communicated by Cheka officers to the detainees' relatives.

The conditions of detention were extremely harsh. Hostages were removed from hospitals (even when seriously ill) transported to Kharkiv during the cold season in unheated railway cars, and confined in prison cells previously occupied by typhoid patients and infested with disease-carrying insects (TsDAVO, f. 4, op. 1, spr. 754, ark. 428–429). Only through the persistent efforts of the Lithuanian commissioner, Professor Vytautas Mošinskis, were all the hostages eventually released after approximately six weeks of detention in various prisons (TsDAVO, f. 4, op. 1, spr. 754, ark. 385).

At any stage of the re-evacuation process, Soviet officials responsible for refugee affairs could arbitrarily remove individuals from already verified and approved departure lists, without any legal justification. One such case involved Bronisław Łukaszewicz, a resident of the Svenciany district in Vilnius province. When he applied for the required certificate from a local military commissar, the official refused to recognize «any [Lithuanian] committees,» expelled him from the office, and, in the presence of witnesses, personally crossed his name off the departure list, remarking, «Now he will know», and «I will not let him leave» (TsDAVO, f. 4, op. 1, spr. 754, ark. 190).

Łukaszewicz later described the situation in the Taganrog district administration as one of «complete chaos and confusion. The documents required one day were deemed invalid the next, and refugees from Lithuania were placed in an extremely precarious position, compounded by the rude and arbitrary behavior of local re-evacuation officials» (TsDAVO, f. 4, op. 1, spr. 754, ark. 181).

Even boarding a train did not guarantee protection from administrative arbitrariness. Refugees were subjected to thorough searches, during which even insignificant items (such as old tablecloths) could be confiscated at the last moment (TsDAVO, f. 4, op. 1, spr. 754, ark. 56). In some cases, the accidental possession of seemingly trivial objects, such as an institutional seal left in a jacket pocket, could lead to arrest and the prohibition of departure (TsDAVO, f. 4, op. 1, spr. 754, ark. 43).

In response to such abuses, it became necessary to clarify existing regulations regarding what constituted «movable property.» This category was defined to

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include household items, kitchen and tableware, clothing, bedding, food, books, musical instruments, and tools necessary for professional activity. However, in practice, these provisions were frequently ignored (TsDAVO, f. 4, op. 1, spr. 754, ark. 136).

For instance, Mina Shor from Kovno was prohibited from taking with her a set of American weighing scales, which she insisted were essential tools of her trade. Before the First World War, she had earned a living using them during the summer season at the Druskininkai resort and later continued this activity in Kharkiv, weighing customers in local theaters. Despite her arguments, the authorities refused permission to export the scales (TsDAVO, f. 4, op. 1, spr. 754, ark. 155).

Similarly, Alter Chaim Berk Fischer from Soloky (Novoaleksandrovsk district, Kovno province) was denied permission to take equipment used in the production of fruit and mineral waters, which he presented as his professional tools and sole means of livelihood (TsDAVO, f. 4, op. 1, spr. 754, ark. 200–201).

Particularly striking was the Soviet authorities' approach to cash carried by refugees. According to the Lithuanian–Ukrainian agreement of February 14, 1921, individuals were permitted to export no more than 100,000 rubles per person. In practice, however, this rule was applied only to adults deemed capable of managing money, and did not extend to children.

As a result, families with children were placed in a particularly disadvantageous position, as they were effectively deprived of the right to export a substantial portion of their savings. For example, a family consisting of two adults and four children, quite typical for the time, would lose up to two-thirds of its total funds (TsDAVO, f. 4, op. 1, spr. 754, ark. 68).

All protests by the Lithuanian commissioner regarding this issue were dismissed by the People's Commissariat for Foreign Affairs of the Ukrainian SSR as an «overly formal interpretation» of the rules, allegedly inconsistent with both «the general spirit» and «the essence» of the agreement (TsDAVO, f. 4, op. 1, spr. 754, ark. 70).

Military censorship officers responsible for inspecting all documents, private correspondence, and photographs carried by refugees to Lithuania exercised their authority in an overtly arbitrary manner. Prior to departure, refugees were required to submit all such materials – together with packaging, sealing wax, and other necessary items – for inspection. These materials were retained for several days, after which they were returned to their owners in sealed packages, without the owners' presence during the sealing process, and with the stipulation that they could only be opened upon arrival at their destination.

This procedure created ample opportunities for abuse. Important documents could be confiscated without explanation; papers and photographs could be mixed with those of other individuals; and prohibited items could even be planted in refugees' belongings as a form of provocation. At the end of June 1921, following

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the departure of the first echelon, the Lithuanian commissioner for re-evacuation formally protested against this practice. He demanded that the sealing of packages be conducted in the presence of their owners and that, in cases of confiscation, refugees be provided with an official list of items deemed prohibited for export.

The People's Commissariat for Foreign Affairs of the Ukrainian SSR supported these demands, considering them reasonable. However, the military censorship authorities rejected the proposal, citing internal regulations that could only be revised in Moscow. As a result, while bureaucratic correspondence continued, this abusive practice remained in force (TsDAVO, f. 4, op. 1, spr. 754, ark. 116).

Faced with widespread arbitrariness, refugees often resorted to traditional means of coping, namely, bribery. This phenomenon was described, for instance, in an article published on August 19, 1922, in the Lithuanian newspaper «Lietuvos Žinios». According to the report, refugees in Katerynoslav formed a special committee of eight members, both Lithuanians and Jews (including Jakubson and Zalk), and pooled their remaining financial resources, authorizing the committee to handle all administrative matters.

The committee initially resorted to bribing Soviet officials, which secured permission for the train to depart on June 10, 1922. However, the provincial re-evacuation commission (gubevak), evidently seeking to extract further payments, demanded an additional 100 million rubles in exchange for issuing the necessary train order. After prolonged negotiations, the sum was reduced to 15 million rubles, and the railway cars were finally provided on June 20, with departure following the next day.

Upon arrival in Kharkiv on June 23, the refugees encountered new obstacles. The committee first paid 5 million rubles to railway workers to move the train closer to the station. Subsequently, Ukrholovevak imposed additional requirements, including compulsory vaccination against smallpox and typhoid, as well as mandatory disinfection procedures in public bathhouses. Authorities warned that the train would be delayed for at least five to seven days to complete these measures.

This provoked dissatisfaction among the refugees. While many recognized the need for hygienic measures, they objected to the manner in which these requirements were enforced – particularly since their belongings in the train cars were not subject to similar treatment. Recognizing the underlying motive, the committee once again collected funds from wealthier refugees in order to «soften» official demands. After a payment of 30 million rubles, the authorities significantly relaxed their position, eventually allowing those unwilling to undergo the procedures to obtain certificates of compliance – for an additional fee of 2 million rubles (TsDAVO, f. 5, op. 1, spr. 1040, ark. 5–6).

It should also be noted that many refugee women decisively refused to undress and bathe in the presence of soldiers responsible for maintaining order in

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the bathhouses, especially as they were required to surrender all clothing and personal items for disinfection.

Even when refugees succeeded in overcoming these numerous bureaucratic obstacles and managed to board the train, their hardships did not end. Transportation conditions were extremely poor. Refugees were carried in freight cars that were wholly unfit for passenger use – often lacking basic features such as bunks, ladders (despite the presence of elderly individuals, children, and persons with disabilities), and even signaling mechanisms necessary for emergency stops. Moreover, the trains typically lacked medical or sanitary cars. Medical assistance, when available at all, was provided only by paramedics rather than qualified physicians (TsDAVO, f. 4, op. 1, spr. 663, ark. 20).

However, the most severe trials awaited Jewish refugees at the border checkpoints – first Soviet, then Latvian, and finally Lithuanian. Even minor irregularities in documentation, technical errors, or sheer arbitrariness on the part of officials could result in refugees being removed from the train. This often occurred at the Soviet border station of Sebezh, through which all trains carrying Lithuanian repatriates from Ukraine were routed.

Similar risks persisted further along the route. On the Latvian side, at the Rozenovska station (now Zilupe), refugees could again be detained or removed from transport upon entering the territory of the Republic of Latvia. Finally, even after overcoming all preceding obstacles, refugees could be denied entry into Lithuania itself at the Abele station (now Obeliai), despite having been previously included in departure lists approved by the Lithuanian commissioner for re-evacuation, Professor Vytautas Mošinskis.

Such an incident occurred in mid-October 1921, when Lithuanian border guards refused entry to 86 passengers from the 5<sup>th</sup> Kharkiv echelon (TsDAVO, f. 4, op. 1, spr. 728, ark. 56). These individuals found themselves in an extremely precarious position: rejected by Lithuania and unable to return easily to Ukraine. Their situation was further exacerbated by the fact that they had already liquidated their property and possessed only limited financial resources. The principal justification provided by the Lithuanian authorities was suspicion of communist affiliations, which rendered these individuals undesirable and potentially dangerous for the state.

In early 1923, the Bolshevik authorities began to curtail the repatriation of refugees from both Soviet Russia and Soviet Ukraine. A key step in this process was the dissolution of the specialized institutions responsible for re-evacuation. On January 1, 1923, the Russian Tsentroevak was officially abolished, followed on January 15 by its Ukrainian counterpart, Ukrholovevak (TsDAVO, f. 5, op. 1, spr. 2157, ark. 1a, 2).

From that point onward, all matters related to the movement of foreign nationals were transferred to newly established evacuation desks within provincial executive committees, subordinated to the People's Commissariat of Internal

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Affairs of the Ukrainian SSR. On April 20, 1923, the Administrative and Organizational Department of this commissariat issued Circular No. 155, entitled «On the termination of the repatriation of refugees from the World War originating from Lithuania» (TsDAVO, f. 5, op. 1, spr. 2157, ark. 11).

According to this directive, all re-evacuation measures foreseen by the Lithuanian–Ukrainian agreement of February 14, 1921, were suspended. Henceforth, former refugees wishing to return to Lithuania were required to do so independently, at their own expense, and under general migration procedures. This entailed obtaining a foreign passport, securing a special exit permit from the Foreign Department of the People’s Commissariat of Internal Affairs, and independently arranging Lithuanian entry and Latvian transit visas.

Furthermore, Lithuanian natives who failed to return and acquire Lithuanian citizenship were to be considered subjects of the Ukrainian SSR, with all corresponding legal consequences (TsDAVO, f. 5, op. 1, spr. 2157, ark. 11). As a result of these measures, the repatriation of Lithuanian Jewish refugees effectively came to a halt.

**Conclusions.** Thus, during the First World War, a substantial number of Jewish refugees from Lithuania found themselves in the Ukrainian provinces of the Russian Empire. The issue of their return became particularly pressing after the end of the prolonged armed struggle in Ukraine and the establishment of Soviet rule over most of its territory. In January–February 1921, a series of Ukrainian–Lithuanian agreements were concluded, in which the problem of refugee repatriation occupied a central place. In essence, this repatriation process (of greater interest to the Republic of Lithuania) also served the Bolshevik regime as a diplomatic instrument, enabling it, under conditions of international isolation, to secure recognition and establish formal relations with foreign states.

According to approximate estimates, more than 65,000 refugees from Lithuania were present on the territory of Soviet Ukraine. During 1921–1922, approximately 25,000–30,000 individuals, nearly half, were able to return home. More than two-thirds of these refugees were Lithuanian Jews (roughly 43,000 in total, of whom 17,000–20,000 were repatriated), a group that proved problematic for both sides involved in the repatriation process.

On the one hand, the Soviet authorities, facing severe famine and economic crisis in the early 1920s, sought to rid themselves as quickly as possible of impoverished, unemployed, ill, and otherwise socially vulnerable populations. At the same time, both central and local officials frequently created obstacles for repatriates, sometimes resorting to arrests or even the taking of hostages. Jews, who constituted the majority of refugees, were particularly exposed to abuse and extortion. Simultaneously, the Soviet government attempted to retain valuable specialists, whose skills were in acute demand, by various administrative means. Nevertheless, many refugees sought to leave Soviet territory at any cost and return home after years of displacement, often having lost most of their property.

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On the other hand, the Lithuanian authorities initially accepted all natives of Lithuanian territories. However, after reassessing the situation, they adjusted their policy, seeking to encourage the return primarily of ethnic Lithuanians in order to strengthen the country's demographic structure, while at the same time limiting the influx of impoverished Jewish refugees. To this end, bureaucratic obstacles were deliberately introduced in the process of registration and the issuance of entry visas. At the same time, Lithuania was willing to admit qualified specialists regardless of their ethnicity, as it too faced a significant shortage of trained personnel.

In effect, the fate of the majority of Lithuanian Jewish refugees remained of limited concern to both the Lithuanian and Soviet Ukrainian authorities. These individuals, often among the most vulnerable, became hostages of broader political and economic considerations, as the two states effectively treated them as instruments within their respective policies.

The repatriation of Lithuanian Jews from Soviet Ukraine in the early 1920s was, on its surface, an orderly diplomatic achievement: two newly recognized states negotiating the return of wartime refugees under formally agreed terms. The archival record tells a different story.

The Ukrainian-Lithuanian agreements of January–February 1921 established a legal framework for repatriation, but that framework served the interests of both governments far more than it served the refugees themselves. For the Bolshevik regime, the return of Lithuanian Jews was never primarily a humanitarian obligation. It was a diplomatic lever, the principal incentive, as Rakovsky himself acknowledged, that brought the Baltic States to the negotiating table. Refugees were, in effect, held in administrative custody: their departure accelerated when it suited Soviet interests, delayed when it did not, and exploited at every stage by officials who treated vulnerable people as a source of personal enrichment. For Lithuania, repatriation was equally instrumental: an opportunity to recover ethnic Lithuanians while minimizing the influx of a Jewish population it did not want. The bureaucratic tools differed (documentation requirements on one side, requisitions and arrests on the other) but the underlying logic was the same. Lithuanian Jews were unwanted simultaneously by both states.

The individual cases documented in this article give concrete form to that structural indifference. Sarah Zif, a seventy-year-old widow in Katerynoslav, could not leave without her conscripted son and had no means to survive without him. Riva Kraut, robbed and left without subsistence, could not recover her own stolen property without official intervention. Eliazar Rubinstein's furniture was declared state property because a party functionary needed his apartment. These are not marginal episodes. They are the repatriation process as most people experienced it – not as a diplomatic procedure but as a sequence of encounters with arbitrary power.

Read from below, the repatriation reveals something that the official correspondence between commissariats and plenipotentiary missions cannot: that the structural position of Lithuanian Jews was one of double statelessness. They were not citizens of Soviet Ukraine, the state holding them, and they were not reliably welcome in the Republic of Lithuania, the state nominally claiming them. They occupied a position outside the protective logic of both the Soviet nationalities framework, which had no category for them as a diaspora minority seeking exit, and the Lithuanian nation-building project, which prioritized ethnic homogeneity over the return of its own Jewish former residents. Their displacement, which had begun with the tsarist deportations of 1915, was not resolved by the postwar settlement.

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### **Руккас А. «ВИХІД З „ДОМУ РАБСТВА”: РЕПАТРІАЦІЯ ЛИТОВСЬКИХ ЄВРЕЇВ ІЗ РАДЯНСЬКОЇ УКРАЇНИ НА ПОЧАТКУ 1920-х РР.»**

#### **Анотація**

**Мета роботи** – проаналізувати процес репатріації литовських євреїв із радянської України на початку 1920-х рр., визначити його масштаби, особливості та основні перешкоди. **Методологія** базується на аналізі архівних документів радянських установ, а також на поєднанні інституційного підходу з мікроісторичним аналізом індивідуальних кейсів. **Наукова новизна** полягає у реконструкції процесу репатріації на основі раніше малозалучених архівних джерел та в обґрунтуванні тези про його інструментальний характер як засобу державної політики. **Висновки**. На території радянської України перебувало понад 65 тис. біженців із Литви, з яких понад дві третини становили євреї; у 1921–1922 рр. вдалося репатріювати близько 25–30 тис. осіб, зокрема 17–20 тис. євреїв. Репатріація не була суто гуманітарним процесом, а використовувалася обома державами у власних інтересах, унаслідок чого значна частина біженців залишилася поза захистом обох держав.

**Ключові слова:** репатріація, євреї, Литва, литовські євреї, біженці Першої світової війни, радянська Україна, Укрголовевак.

**Rukkas A. «WYJŚCIE Z “DOMU NIEWOLI”: REPATRIACJA ŻYDÓW  
LITEWSKICH Z RADZIECKIEJ UKRAINY NA POCZĄTKU LAT 20. XX W.»**

**Streszczenie**

**Cel pracy** – analiza procesu repatriacji litewskich Żydów z radzieckiej Ukrainy na początku lat 20. XX w., określenie jego skali, specyfiki oraz głównych przeszkód. **Metodologia** opiera się na analizie materiałów archiwalnych instytucji radzieckich oraz na połączeniu podejścia instytucjonalnego z mikrohistoryczną analizą indywidualnych przypadków. **Nowość naukowa** polega na rekonstrukcji procesu repatriacji na podstawie dotąd słabo wykorzystywanych źródeł archiwalnych oraz na uzasadnieniu tezy o jego instrumentalnym charakterze jako narzędzia polityki państwowej, które sprzyjało powstawaniu faktycznej bezpaństwowości litewskich Żydów. **Wnioski.** Na terytorium radzieckiej Ukrainy znajdowało się ponad 65 tys. uchodźców z Litwy, z czego ponad dwie trzecie stanowili Żydzi; w latach 1921–1922 repatriowano około 25–30 tys. osób, w tym 17–20 tys. Żydów. Repatriacja nie była procesem czysto humanitarnym, lecz była wykorzystywana przez oba państwa dla własnych celów, w wyniku czego znaczna część uchodźców znalazła się poza ochroną obu systemów państwowych.

**Słowa kluczowe:** repatriacja, Żydzi, Litwa, Żydzi litewscy, uchodźcy I wojny światowej, radziecka Ukraina, Ukrholovevak.

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