

The Public Criminological Discourse in Soviet and Transitional Lithuania

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Abstract. This article is dedicated to analyzing public criminological discourse in Stalinist, post-Stalinist and post-Soviet Lithuania. Its chronological boundaries are between 1940 (when Soviet first-time occupied country) and early 2000s (when Lithuania released new, not Soviet-based criminal code, finalized post-Soviet criminal prosecution reform and joined European Union and NATO). The article does not include the period of Nazi Germany occupation of Lithuania (1941–1944), since the conditions of that period are very different and requires additional research. Early 2000s have also marked the end of mass crime and gang and mafia violence. Since then, crime numbers considerably decreased and today are relatively low. The public discourse, as the article reveals, does not necessarily match the crime reality. For instance, in Stalinist period, the politically constructed enemy was the dominating definition of the criminal.

Der öffentliche kriminologische Diskurs in Sowjet-Litauen und in der Transformationszeit

Dieser Beitrag analysiert den öffentlichen Kriminalitätsdiskurs im stalinistischen, post-stalinistischen und postsowjetischen Litauen. Der Zeitraum reicht von 1940 (als die Sowjets Litauen zum ersten Mal besetzten) bis in die frühen 2000er Jahre (als Litauen ein neues Strafrecht erließ und die post-sowjetische Reform der Strafverfolgung durchführte, sowie der EU und der NATO beitrug). Ausgespart bleibt die Zeit der nationalsozialistischen Besetzung Litauens (1941–1944), weil hier vollkommen andere Bedingungen herrschten, die zusätzlicher Forschung bedürften. Die Jahrtausendwende markiert auch das Ende der massenhaften und organisierten Kriminalität sowie der Gewaltausübung von Mafiosi und Gangs. Seither sind die Fallzahlen deutlich gesunken und heute verhältnismäßig niedrig. Es zeigt sich, dass der öffentliche Diskurs nicht unbedingt mit der Realität übereinstimmt. In der stalinistischen Zeit etwa wurde der politische Feind automatisch als Krimineller diskreditiert.

Keywords: Criminological discourse, crime, public sphere, Lithuania, Soviet, Post-Soviet | Kriminalitätsdiskurs, Verbrechen, Öffentlichkeit, Litauen, Sowjetunion, Postsowjetische Zeit

1 Introduction

The aim of this article is to analyze the changing definition of crime in Lithuania during the Soviet and transitional period in public criminological discourse. I seek to reveal how: a) in the changing nature of Lithuanian public discourse – during the Soviet occupation and after it was liberated from Soviet censorship – the concept of crime was created b) how it was reflected in the public discourse.

In this article, the concept “transition” is used while talking about the post-Soviet period. It would fit, at least to some extent, into the time frame between Perestroika, declaration of Lithuania’s independence (late 1980s – early 1990s) and joining the European Union and NATO (2004). While the chronological boundaries of “Soviet” era include the first (1940-1941) and the second (from 1944) occupations of the territory of Lithuania by the USSR.

The Soviet period in our research is divided into Stalinist and post-Stalin’s periods. This choice was made due to the significant changes in criminal law and public criminological discourse – as well as the practical side of criminal prosecution process.

The post-Soviet period in the whole Soviet and post-Soviet sphere and beyond can be analyzed using such metaphors as “transformation”, “fraction”, “turning point”,¹ or even “the end of history”.² It meant also transformation of law and sudden influx of the Western criminological discourses and ideas to Eastern Europe.

In Lithuania the most intense political, social and institutional changes took place from the late 1980’s throughout the last decade of the 20th Century. At that time, criminological and legal concepts were also newly rethought, recreated and redefined – including the concept of crime.

“Public criminological discourse” in this article is understood within the framework of a theory and methodology, related to criminological knowledge,

1 For instance, Lithuanian scholar Zenonas Norkus focused on Lithuanian radical 1990’s shift from the Soviet state socialism to the market economy in related to the democratic reform. He used the term “transformation” mostly. See more in: Zenonas Norkus (2008): *Kokia demokratija, koks kapitalizmas? Pokomunistinė transformacija Lietuvoje lyginamosios istorinės sociologijos požiūriu*. [Which Democracy, which Capitalism? Lithuania’s Postcommunist Transformation in the Perspective of Comparative History and Sociology] Vilnius: Vilniaus universiteto leidykla.

2 This term is inspired by political philosopher and political scientist Francis Fukuyama, who used it in his book “The End of History and the Last Man”, first published in 1992. Fukuyama argues that with the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the liberal democracy will be the dominating global agenda – and the Western liberal democracy as the global and final form of human government. See more in: Fukuyama, Francis (2006): *The End of History and the Last Man*, Simon and Schuster.

that Lithuanian criminologist Aleksandras Dobryninas developed, inspired by the methodology of the philosopher and sociologist Alfred Schütz. Dobryninas has transformed Schütz's ideas to be suitable to measure what he calls "criminological discourses". Aleksandras Dobryninas, Ilona Čėsniėnė, Margarita Dobrynina, Vincentas Giedraitis and Remigijus Merkevičius use the concept of criminological discourse in one of their works, proposing the idea of interaction between knowledge, power and language³.

The term "public discourse" is also related to the concept of the "public sphere", which was redefined and popularized in modern-day academic world by the German sociologist Jürgen Habermas⁴ and later developed by other researchers. The public sphere can be defined as a space constituted by critical inter-individual communication capable of creating an alternative to state-dominated discourses. Usually, in democratic societies, it is a synonym of the Mass Media.⁵

Schütz identified three different levels of knowledge about a certain social phenomenon, which "allow constructing three different ideal types that can be identified as "the expert" (expert knowledge), "the well-informed citizen" (intermediate knowledge), "the man on the street" (everyday knowledge)". These groups are referred to as different groups of a certain society and may involve many different social actors, "from universities and political parties to the mass media and rural communities".⁶

Aleksandras Dobryninas further develops the idea of criminological discourses, also classifying them as: a) the professional criminological discourse, which is formulated by the academic professionals of law and criminology; b) the public criminological discourse, or the construction and representation of the phenomenon of crime in the mass media; c) the political criminological discourse, or the level of the governing structures (or political power) defining and understanding the concept of crime and the phenomenon of criminality.⁷

3 Aleksandras Dobryninas (et al., 2013): Specific Characteristics of the Reception of Criminal Justice in Lithuanian Society, in: *Sociologija. Mintis ir veiksmai*, 33(2), pp. 239-264.

4 Jürgen Habermas (1991): *The structural transformation of the public sphere. An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, Cambridge: The MIT Press.

5 Lincoln Dahlberg (2004): The Habermasian Public Sphere: A Specification of the Idealized Conditions of Democratic Communication, in: *Studies in Social and Political Thought* (10), pp. 3-6.

6 Alfred Schütz (1964): "The well-informed citizen". In: Idem, *A Collective Papers*, Vol. 2. The Hague, 1964, pp. 120-134.

7 A. Dobryninas (1996): "Democratic Change and Crime Control in Lithuania: Compiling New Criminological Discourses", NATO Fellowship Programme Final Report, Vilnius; accessible online: <<http://www.nato.int/acad/fellow/94-96/dobrynin/concl.htm>> [last visited on 19th June 2023].

Of course, these discourses can be interrelated and interconnected – this article will reveal, how the professional criminological discourse sometimes merged with the public one. While the “people from the street” discourse can also be revealed in the Mass Media – it is not necessarily based on facts, but rather on myths, stereotypes and fears.

One more theoretical concept to be discussed is called the “moral panic”. It is an inadequate, exaggerated social reaction to what is believed to be a threat to social norms, morality and well-being. Such a reaction raises the question of whether the moral fabric of society is falling apart. The phenomenon was carefully analyzed by the sociologist and criminologist Stanley Cohen.⁸

The main method used is a discourse analysis, combined with archival research. A very important part of the research was the analysis of the Soviet Lithuanian and Post-Soviet press – especially the newspapers *Tiesa*, *Šluota*, *Lietuvos rytas*, *Lietuvos aidas*, *Respublika*, and others. It helped to reconstruct the public criminological discourse. An archival collection No 79 of the Modern Archives of the State of Lithuania was also useful. In this research we have also used ten semi-structured interviews with officers that worked in the criminal prosecution system in LSSR and independent Lithuania from the late Soviet era the early 2000s.

2 Constructing enemy: ideological, legal sources and dominating public criminological discourse during Stalinism

When the Soviet Union occupied the Lithuanian Republic in 1940, one of the initial steps it took was the destruction of the Lithuanian legal system, and the attempts to formulate the new concept of crime: in ideology, legal theory and legal practice.⁹ During the Stalinism, in the public discourse, the most common image of the criminal in Lithuanian SSR was the “enemy” – “class” or the “political” one. Due to the very strict censorship, only some type of crimes could be depicted in public – political crimes of the real and imagined “enemies” of the Soviet state, so-called “hooliganism”, “banditism”, “kulaks”, sabotage, plundering of the socialist property and other economic crimes.

8 Stanley Cohen (2011): *Folk Devils and Moral Panics: The Creation of the Mods and Rockers*, Routledge.

9 Arvydas Anušauskas et al. (eds., 1997): *Lietuva 1940-1990. Okupuotos Lietuvos istorija* [Lithuania 1940–1990. The History of Occupied Lithuania]. Vilnius: Lietuvos gyventojų genocido ir rezistencijos tyrimo centras, p. 96.

It is important to stress that when we are referring to the crime and criminal's images and depictions in Mass Media, they don't necessarily match the exact categories and articles of the criminal code. This is truth talking about either Stalinism, or post-Stalin and Late-Soviet periods – despite the huge differences how crime was constructed and during the Stalin's era and after it. We will come back to this question talking about Kulaks specifically.

It is worth mentioning, that during the Soviet period, Lithuania did not formulate independent legal theory or doctrine. It adopted ideological clichés and dominant trends of the USSR. Thus, the LSSR public criminological discourse took over the idea of criminal nature of the wealthy classes and bourgeoisie and the poor peasants and workers committing crimes only because they were suppressed by higher social elites and could not survive otherwise.

Talking about legal theory, there were two main great Soviet jurists: Evgeny Pashukanis (Russian: Евгений Брониславович Пашуканис, 1891–1937) and Andrey Vyshinsky (Андрей Януарьевич Вышинский, 1883–1954). Pashukanis developed a legal theory, called “legal nihilism”. As a radical marxist and communist, he claimed that law is not an independent subject of social regulation and social reality in general but only a superstructure, which developed in the course of evolution of economic social relations. In his theory of criminal law, he claimed that “the role of the purely legal superstructure – the role of law – declines” and will completely disappear when socialism and later communism will be created. It is because in the ideal society crimes will disappear – as their main reasons, social inequality and class oppression, will not exist anymore. Pashukanis thought however that even in revolutionary and post-revolutionary period law is not necessary.¹⁰

Vyshinsky started a different Soviet legal thinking tradition called “restoration of law” – although the idea that crime will vanish in communist utopia did not disappear during the whole Soviet period. Vyshinsky managed to develop a separate legal theory and doctrine.¹¹ He stated that the highest level of the development of law was reached not in capitalism, but in socialism in one state – thus, he developed a legal theory of positivism in place of that of nihilism. This change was determined by two reasons: the practical need for law in a society where crime rates, contrary to the above-discussed “legal nihilist” believe, did

10 Evgeny Bronislavovich Pashukanis (2007): *The General Theory of Law and Marxism*. New Brunswick, London, p. 29.

11 Вышинский, Евгений Брониславович (1941): *Теория судебных доказательств в советском праве* [Theory of Providing Proof in Soviet Law], Москва.

not decline even after socialism had been established and declared in Soviet Union. Vyshinsky played role in justifying Stalin’s “Great Purge” (1936–1938)¹² in legal terminology, also, as one of the active lawyers during Nuremberg trials.¹³

The Soviet definition of crime after the occupation of 1940 and reoccupation of 1944 was transferred to Lithuania. At that time Soviet law was most impacted by ideas of Vyshinsky. As Lithuania at that time was not allowed to develop legal thinking, separate from Moscow – here books by Vyshinsky were translated in Lithuanian language and published.¹⁴ Soviet law of that time constructed criminal as a class enemy (usually related to the concept of bourgeoisie). In the ideological context and public sphere criminals were depicted, first of all, as social parasites seeking to destroy the Soviet order.¹⁵

It is worth mentioning that, during the Stalinist period, the occupied Lithuania not only lacked its own interpretation of Soviet legal theory and doctrine – even the criminal code used here was the criminal code of Soviet Russia.¹⁶ The criminal code contained the article that was used to oppress the political opposition and anyone fitting the definition of the “enemy” – the infamous Article 58. It had very broad formulations and therefore could be used to repress and execute individuals in many different circumstances. Soviet Stalinist law also contained so-called “principle of analogy” – that meant that, according to Soviet criminal

12 The Great Purge or Great Terror was a political purge in the Soviet Union from 1936 to 1938. According to official figures, the death toll was 681 692 executions and 116 000 deaths in the Gulag system. However, some estimates show that the number of victims might have been from 700 000 to 1.2 million.

13 David M. Crowe (ed., 2019): *Stalin’s Soviet Justice. “Show” Trials, War Crimes Trials, and Nuremberg*. Bloomsbury Academic; F. J. Feldbrugge (1963): *Soviet Criminal Law. The Last Six Years*, in: *The Journal of Criminal Law, Criminology and Police Science*, vol. 54, no. 3 (September), p. 261-262; Harold J. Berman (1963): *Justice in the USSR. An Interpretation of Soviet Law*, New York: Vintage Books.

14 Andriejus Višinskis (1941): *Tarybinė baudžiamoji teisė* [Soviet Criminal Law], Vilnius: Vilniaus universiteto teisės fakultetas, 1941; *idem*, *Tarybinis baudžiamasis procesas*, Vilnius: Vilniaus universiteto teisės mokslų fakultetas.

15 See more in: Monika Kareniauskaitė (2017): *Crime and punishment in Lithuanian SSR*, Doctoral Thesis, Vilnius.

16 RTFSR baudžiamasis kodeksas su pakeitimais iki 1940 m. lapkričio 15 d., Kaunas, 1941 [Criminal Code of Russian SFSR with Amendments until November 15, 1940]; RTFSR Baudžiamasis kodeksas veikias Lietuvos TSR teritorijoje. Oficialus tekstas su pakeitimais 1951 m. liepos 1 dienai ir su pastraipsniui susistemintos medžiagos priedu [Criminal Code of Russian SFSR, Valid in the Territory of Lithuanian SSR, as of July 1, 1951, Containing an Annex with Materials Systemized Article-by-Article]. Vilnius, 1952.

law, if there was not suitable article to prosecute a person, a similar article in the criminal code could be used. This principle in practice meant practically everyone's chances to be prosecuted – if the Soviet regime decides so.¹⁷

It was during the first Soviet occupation of Lithuania already that de-humanizing rhetorical forms were used in the Mass Media of the time to describe social groups understood as “enemies” and “political criminals”, thus repeating the ideological clichés of the revolutionary period Russia. This rhetoric was as a rule directed against concrete target groups, which were planned to be repressed – first of all, the former Interwar Lithuania's elite and officers (including lawyers and law enforcement personnel), later, especially during the collectivization so-called “kulaks”.¹⁸

However, public criminological discourse did not always match the exact crime definitions of the criminal code. Good example here could be deportation of these considered enemies during the Stalin's era: a) former political, economic and other elites, b) kulaks (understood as “rich farmers”). In the strict legal terms, deportations of Lithuanian inhabitants – just like in the rest of USSR – were not defined as punishment of criminals in Soviet administrative language – but as the population transfers. There were no even show trials organized – not trials at all. People were deported due to certain administrative quota – a certain number of individuals, labelled as “enemies”, that the regime has decided to get rid of¹⁹.

So, deportees were usually confused – although they had a sense that they are treated as criminals. They were even trying write and send complaint letters to Stalin, asking to reconsider their case and stating that they did not commit any “crime” against the Soviet occupational government²⁰. However, in practice deportees were treated not much different from the Gulag prisoners: for example, their freedom of movement was strictly restricted, they were subjected to the forced labor, living conditions were extreme, including food ration, poor or no housing in harsh Siberian winters, being constantly observed by the guards. Such conditions led to severe malnutrition, diseases, freezing (also to death);

17 Harold J. Berman (1946): Principles of Soviet Criminal Law, in: *Yale Law Journal*, 56, 1946, p. 803.

18 „Šalin smetoniška gauja iš mūsų tarpo“ [Gang of President Smetona, Get out of our Circle], in: *Tiesa* [The Truth], 1940 06 28, No 8, p. 3.

19 See more about this method of political persecution of Stalinist “constructed enemies” in: Gregory, Paul R. (2009): *Terror by Quota: State Security from Lenin to Stalin*, New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press.

20 Lietuvos Ypatingasis Archyvas [Lithuanian Special Archives], f. V-5, ap. 1, b. 41525, l. 2 a. p., 3, 14 a. p.

the mortality of deportees was high, especially among children and elderly persons.²¹

Back to the public discourse – not only the former elite but also the entire independent Lithuanian Republic of 1918–1940 was depicted as criminal state in which corruption, bribery and theft flourished. These tendencies repeated the Marxist and Bolshevik idea that a crime was caused by the unjust capitalist system and would disappear in Communism and that the main task of the socialist state was to fight against the political crime.

So, no wonder that in the public discourse the image was constructed that only certain people will be allowed to participate in building the new system, as well as being employed by the Soviet administration – those who “did not make any career”, did not have any property” and were not class enemies, meaning that their family origin was workers or peasants.²² As was already mentioned – in reality those who were considered as “not worth to participate” needed to be deported, imprisoned and sent to Gulags, with or without official criminal sentence.

The press informed society about what actions would be regarded as criminal ones in the new social order; for instance, any kind of criticism of the Communist Party, its leaders, and the Soviet administration.²³ There were also articles about the entire former legal system as the unjust and corrupted one – where laws were allegedly designed only to protect the needs of the ruling class. The requirement to “cleanse our law-making system” from the unjust laws of Smetona (former president of Interwar Lithuania) was expressed, promising much more justice in the Communist state and society.²⁴

So, during the First Soviet occupation of Lithuania, as in the post-revolutionary Russia, the political crime was linked, first of all, with criminalization of the former elites – as a real or imaginary political opposition.

21 See more in: Monika Kareniauskaitė (2018): Tremtinio sąvoka ir trėmimų samprata Lietuvos sovietinės okupacijos metais: teisiniai, ideologiniai, administraciniai ir socialiniai aspektai [Concept of a Deportee and Perception of Deportations during the Years of Soviet Occupation in Lithuania: Legal, Ideological, Administrative and Social Aspects] in: *Genocidas ir rezistencija* [Genocide and Resistance], 1 (43), p. 28-41.

22 Viešai ir griežčiausiai smerkiu savo buvimą pas tautininkus. Buvusių tautininkų žodis [I publicly and most strongly condemn my membership in the Lithuanian Nationalist Union. A word from a former member of Nationalist Union], in: *Tiesa* [The Truth], 1940 06 28, No. 8, p. 2.

23 Z. K. Karys (1940): Kariškio žodis (laiškas iš kariuomenės) [Word of a Military Man (A Letter from the Army)], in: *Tiesa* [The Truth], 1940 06 28, No. 8, p. 3

24 „Einam saulės parsinešti.” Kalbos pasakytos per mitingą sporto halėje birželio 29 d. [“We are Going to Bring the Sun”: Speeches Given during a Rally in Kaunas Sports Hall on June 29], in: *Tiesa*, 1940 07 01, No. 10, p. 3.

Similar trends continued when Lithuania, after the Nazi Germany occupation (1941–1944), was again taken over by the Soviets in 1944 and the Second Soviet occupation began. In the 4th plenary session of the Central Comity of the Communist Party of Lithuania, which took place on 27–30 December 1944, urgent inducements were declared to imprison or even impose a death sentence on the criminals who were “acting against the Soviet state”. The rhetoric used at the plenary session reveals a close relationship between the concept of a criminal and the concept of an enemy in the LSSR – criminological rhetoric was used to define the political or ideological enemy. For example, the whole former elite of the Interwar Lithuanian Republic was labelled as “criminal”, declaring the need to imprison the former upper class.²⁵ These trends were reflected in the press.²⁶

In the end and right after the World War II, in Soviet occupied Lithuania, just like in the whole USSR, a concept of political enemy and criminal was expanded to the images of “fascist”, “Nazi” and “German”.

This trend was related to the fact that The World War II had impacted the Soviet law, and brought at least one key difference – trials of the suspected real Nazi collaborators were organized, instead of legal processes against purely imagined political enemies of the Great Terror era. However, according to Cadiot and Penter, though “the war brought several new influences into Soviet law and justice system”, many core premises in the legal theory, laws and old Stalinist patterns coming from the 1930 and even an earlier period in legal practices continued.²⁷

In post-war Soviet occupied Lithuania, a term “German bourgeois nationalist” appeared and soon gained popularity in the ideology and public discourse. The plot and image of the Soviet victory, as well as the topic of the “German as an enemy” were common in the post-War press and the public discourse.²⁸

25 *Lietuvos Komunistų Partijos (bolševikų) Centro Komiteto IV plenumas. 1944 m. gruodžio 27-30 d.* [The 4th Plenum of the Central Committee of the Lithuanian Communist Party (Bolsheviks). 27th-30th of December, 1944], Vilnius; 1945, pp. 71, 75, 78.

26 A. Maginskas: Tegyvuoją 13 – oji Lietuvos socialistinė sovietų respublika. Vilniečių mitingas [May Lithuanian Socialist Soviet Republic, the Thirteenth /*Republic of the Soviet Union* – note by Vilnius University editor/ Prosper! Rally of Vilnius City Residents], in: *Tiesa*, 1940 07 01, No 10, p. 3; Zigmas Genys: Komunistų partija legali! [The Communist Party is Legal!], in: *Tiesa*, 1940 06 26, No 6, p. 2.

27 Juliette Cadiot / Tanja Penter (2013): Law and Justice in Wartime and Postwar Stalinism, in: *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas*, No. 2, p. 161.

28 Viktoras Janušas (1945): Padėdamas frontui atkeršysiu vokiškiems grobikams [By Helping the Frontline I will Revenge German Looters], in: *Tiesa*, 1945 04 03, No. 76 (606), p. 3; A. Liepinis (1945): Plaukia nauji kadrai į sostinę Vilnių [New Personnel is Flowing to Vilnius, the Capital], in: *Tiesa*, 1945 04 04, No. 77(607), p. 3.

The press, in general, did not avoid printing articles about the War criminals related to the Nazi dictatorship, their arrest and trials in the countries outside the USSR.²⁹ Such topics as revenge on the perpetrators and the restoration of justice became more and more common.³⁰

However, Nazi Germany and its officials were depicted not only as extremely negative because of their Nazi ideology, their role in the war crimes committed and because of their being enemies of the Soviet Union but also, as the press wrote, because they were “thieves”, “burglars”, and “plunderers”.³¹ Thus, the tendency to use the “criminal” argumentation and symbolic rhetorical forms to depict the political enemies was clear there too.

The construction of the other enemy image, “kulak” in the Soviet Lithuanian public discourse is mostly related to the process of collectivization, that actively started in the LSSR only during the second Soviet occupation. We have already mentioned that, in reality, “kulaks” in Lithuania’s case were deported, not actually imprisoned (even the conditions of deportees and Gulag prisoners, as already said, was not that different).

In the late 1940s criminalization of the “kulaks” became extremely significant in the press. In 1949 the First Secretary of the Lithuanian Communist Party Antanas Sniečkus publicly expressed joy related to the fact that Lithuanian peasants were successfully mobilized in the fight “against the kulaks”. He expressed hope that this led to a successful end of the collectivization process³². In the press, the “Kulak” was referred to not only as the “enemy of the collectivization” but also as the “enemy of the Lithuanian nation”.³³

There were also cases in the press, when motives for committing other kinds of crimes, for instance, acts of plundering, were explained as the outcome or a trait of the social origin, that is being a kulak.³⁴

29 Užsienio kronika [Foreign Chronicle], in: *Tiesa*, 1945 04 05, No. 78 (608), p. 4; Rumunijoje suimami fašistiniai nusikaltėliai [Fascist Criminals are being Arrested in Romania], in: *Tiesa*, 1945 04 06, No. 79 (609), p. 4.

30 Rūsčioji sąskaita [The Stern Bill], on: *Tiesa*, 1945 04 07, No. 80 (610), p. 1.

31 Bus teisiamas Graikų karininkas Atėnuose [A Greek Officer will Go on Trial in Athens], in: *Tiesa*, 1945 05 16, No. 112 (642), p. 4; Rūsčioji sąskaita [The Stern Bill], in: *Tiesa*, 1945 04 07, No. 80 (610), p. 1.

32 Lietuvos KP(b) centro komiteto ataskaita. Lietuvos KP (b) CK sekretoriaus drg. A. Sniečkaus pranešimas [Account of Lithuanian Communist Party (Bolsheviks). Presentation by Comrad A. Sniečkus, Secretary of Lithuanian CP Central Committee], in: *Tiesa*, 1949 02 17, No 39 (1792), p. 1.

33 Buožija – pikčiausias kolektyvinių ūkių santvarkos priešas [Kulaks as the Fiercest Enemy of the System of Collective Farms], in: *Tiesa*, 1949 03 30, No. 74 (1827), p. 3.

34 Janina Malcienė (1945): Tarybų valdžia – mūsų valdžia [Soviet Government is our Government], in: *Tiesa*, 1945 04 03, No. 76 (606), p. 3.

This attitude was expressed by J. Bielka, the Chairman of the LSSR Supreme Court when he appealed to the Soviet citizens encouraging them to “fight” with plundering, and based his arguments on the Soviet Constitution: “the societies’ socialist property is a sacred and unshakeable background of the Soviet structure, the source of homelands’ “wealth and power”, therefore the people, who intend to plunder or do any harm to this property, according to Bielka, were “the peoples’ enemies”. So, the depiction of plunderers and thieves of state property as “enemies” also became common in the public discourse. It was stressed that such criminals deserved the most severe punishment. For instance, the death penalty was considered to be the most appropriate punishment. It was also underlined that in case of plundering of state property crimes had to be given extensive coverage in the mass media.³⁵

“Saboteur” was another definition and a symbol of a very dangerous criminal – enemy.³⁶ The imaginary acts of the so-called “saboteurs” in Soviet propaganda became an explanation of why processes of industrialization and collectivization were not productive and successful in all cases.³⁷ The press urged the people to punish “saboteurs” by “using utmost strictness of Soviet laws”. The requirement to take legal actions against “saboteurs”, which was common during the first Soviet occupation already, continued to be imposed after the second occupation too.³⁸

The last Stalinist shift in the “enemy” discourse was marked by the start of the Cold War – a new concept of the enemy was integrated, associated with the United States of America.³⁹ In 1948 Germany was still depicted as the great enemy,⁴⁰ but the anti-American discourse already appeared from time to time.⁴¹

A new definition of a criminal, a person who performed actions of espionage for the USA caught the eye of Soviet propagandists and became a part of the content

35 J. Bielka (1945): Griezta kovokime su visuomeninio socialistinio turto grobimu [Let us be Harsh in our Fight against Stealing the Public Social Property], in: *Tiesa*, 1945 04 07, No 80 (610), p. 2.

36 A. Marganavičius (1948): Kenkimas ar politinis aklumas [Inflicting Damage – or Political Blindness?], in: *Tiesa*, 1948 01 15, No 12 (1455), p. 2; Iš nepaskelbtų laiškų „Tiesai“ [From Letters to the Tiesa Daily which never got Published], in: *Tiesa*, 1948 05 26, No. 123 (1566), p. 3.

37 Apsileidimas ar kenkimas? [Negligence or Sabotage], in: *Tiesa*, 1946 01 04, No 3 (837), p. 3.

38 Nepastabūs registratoriai [Property Inspectors Lacking Attention], in: *Tiesa*, 1948 02 05, No 29 (1472), p. 3.

39 Amerikiečių interventų žvėriškumai Korėjoje [Brutality of American Invaders in Korea], in: *Tiesa*, 1950 10 10, No. 240 (2301), p. 4.

40 Jonas Šimkus (1948): Šviesus kelias [A Bright Path], in: *Tiesa*, 1948 01 18, No. 15 (1458), p. 2.

41 Pasibaigė „Pažangiųjų Amerikos piliečių“ suvažiavimas [The Meeting of the ‘Progressive Citizens of America’ Finished], in: *Tiesa*, 1948 01 22, No. 18 (1461), p. 4.

of the mass media in the LSSR.⁴² The press also reported about the war crimes committed by the Americans in Korea: the use of biological weapons,⁴³ American soldiers raping 10-15 years old girls, beating, injuring, and stealing from the local people⁴⁴ and other “terrible crimes”.⁴⁵ The public criminological discourse was also full of cases of various crimes committed in “other capitalist” countries.⁴⁶

Talking about the reality and numbers, during the first Soviet occupation (1940-1941) there were 23 000 people deported or imprisoned in Lithuania. In the years 1944-1953, numbers were such: 186 000 residents of Lithuania arrested and imprisoned, 118 000 deported, 28 000 died in the places of deportations.⁴⁷

3 Crime that did (not?) vanish: development of the public criminological discourse after Stalin and in the late Soviet era

In the post-Stalin era, the Soviet ideology and perception on how crime should be treated and depicted has changed considerably – as did the regime. The discourse of criminal as the enemy that has to be eliminated (because it causes existential threat to the Soviet regime and mission) was changed by the idea that socialism has already won – and the crime, that exists is nothing more than some “remnants of the past” (coming back to idea that crime will wither away on its own, once the communism is established). This also marked the post-Stalinist shift from totalitarian to authoritarian regime and the change of the discourse from the hot “total” war with inner and external enemies to the Cold war realities.

A post-Stalinist trend in transformation of the definition of the crime – associating it with the remnants of the “old system” that will vanish soon – reached its culmination under the rule of Brezhnev. But also the new type of criminal ap-

42 Šnipų organizacijos procese Lenkijoje [Inside the Trial of a Spy Organization in Poland], *Tiesa*, 1953 01 29, No. 24 (3007), p. 4.

43 Amerikiniai barbarai tebe naudoja Korėjoje bakteriologinį ginklą [American Barbarians are still Using Bacteriological Weapon in Korea], in: *Tiesa*, 1953 01 30, No. 25 (3008), p. 4.

44 Amerikos karių chuliganiški veiksmai Vakarų Vokietijoje [Rowdy Actions of American Soldiers in West Germany], in: *Tiesa*, 1953 03 05, No. 54 (3037), p. 4.

45 Neįmanoma nuslėpti siaubingus amerikinių agresorių nusikaltimus [It is Impossible to Sweep under the Carpet the Heinous Crimes of American Aggressors], in: *Tiesa*, 1953 03 05, No. 54 (3037), p. 4.

46 Korupcija Italijos vyriausybėje partijoje [Corruption in the Ruling Party in Italy], in: *Tiesa*, 1953 02 07, No. 32 (3015), p. 3.

47 Lietuvos gyventojų netektys 1940–1986 ir 1991 metais [Losses of Lithuanian Population in 1940–1986 and 1991], <https://www.genocid.lt/centras/lt/147/cl>. [06.10.2025]

peared – not an enemy, but someone anti-social, or lacking certain qualities of ideal *homo sovieticus*. Brezhnev stressed that creating a new type of socialist individual, a communist-type human being was the most important aim of the communist transformation, and that in the period of late socialism this type already existed. In the late Soviet period the criminal was defined, first and foremost, as a person who lacked certain features and qualities of an ideal type.⁴⁸

Such ideas were expressed, for instance, in the book for law students, titled “Tarybų baudžiamoji teisė” (Soviet Penal Law), which was published in 1965, focused on the idea of “communist education” for society and individuals as the best method to prevent crime:

...we still have rudiments of capitalism, alien to communist morality. Unfortunately, there are still people who do not want to work honestly, but try to live at the expense of others. They plunder socialist property, speculate and try to cheat on the society.⁴⁹

Such attitude was reflected, also, by the professionals. An interviewed respondent, a male, born in 1957, who worked at the institutions of criminal search and interrogation for 25 years (and who started his career in the Militia of Kaunas district in 1977) said that while he was a student at Kaunas Militia School the following explanations of the reasons of criminality were given: “during the Soviet times the explanation was that it was a bourgeois remnant, a vestige, alcoholism, drug abuse, child neglect, family problems...”⁵⁰

This regime’s change and shift from totalitarian to authoritarian also meant drastic decrease in people sentenced for political reasons. In the period of 1954–1990 there were only approximately 1000 such people in Lithuanian SSR – huge contrast to Stalinist terror times.⁵¹ However, these numbers do not include dissidents and persecuted (for instance, religious) minorities that were suppressed

48 A. Cegelis (1981): *Visuomenė socialistinio teisėtumo ir teisėtvarkos sargybose: medžiaga lektoriui* [Society as a Protector of Socialist Legality and the Order of Law: Materials for a Lecturer]. Vilnius, p. 1.

49 Arvydas Pocius (2007): Nusikaltėlio asmenybės samprata Rusijos autorių kriminologinių koncepcijų kontekste [Perception of the Personality of a Criminal in the Context of Criminology Concepts Developed by Russian Authors], in: *Jurisprudencija* [Jurisprudence], 5 (95), Vilnius, p. 73

50 „...sovietmečiu tai aiškino čia yra ir buržuazijos atgyvena, palikimas, girtuokliavimas, narkomanija, vaikų nepriežiūra, šeimyninės problemos...“. Interview with male, born in 1957, worked as the investigator at Militia in Kaunas district. Interview was recorded in Kaunas, in 2012 by Monika Kareniauskaitė.

51 See more in: Lietuvos gyventojų netektys 1940–1986 ir 1991 metais [Losses of Lithuanian Population in 1940–1986 and 1991], <https://www.genocid.lt/centras/lt/147/c/> [06.10.2025]

using non-political articles of the criminal code, violation of the Soviet labor-related laws) or by non-criminal measures (for instance forced usage of psychiatry⁵² to suppress dissidents or subcultures).

Here it is worth mentioning that in post-Stalinist period Soviet Lithuania gradually drafted and adopted its' own criminal code – even if using the same patterns as in the other Soviet republics. For political crimes dissidents were mostly persecuted using such articles of the criminal code: Article 68 (“Anti-Soviet agitation and propaganda”), Article 143 (violation of the law on the separation of church and state and school from church), Articles 164, 165 (“Speculation”, or illegal trading), Article 240 (“Vagrancy and Begging”).⁵³

As mentioned already, the idea that the crime will vanish, once communism will be built, was born in the early revolutionary Russia. However, even after Stalin or during Leonid Brezhnev’s “mature socialism”, crime still existed, and was growing – even if Soviet propaganda was trying hard to mask and hide crime problem.⁵⁴

Soviet regime, in general, did have the tendency to depict the reality in the Soviet sphere in positive colors. It is especially truth talking about crime statistics. Even after the death of Stalin, newspapers, magazines, radio and television avoided disclosing information related to the criminological statistics and crime rates.⁵⁵ Releasing statistics related to criminality, such as crime rates, was possible only in confidential documents of the Lithuanian Ministry of Interior, Public Prosecutor’s Department and Militia or in the KGB documents. Statistical publications, including all important sectors of Soviet Lithuania’s social, political and economic life, avoided crime topic.⁵⁶

52 See more in: Robert Van Voren (2011): Psychiatry as a tool of repression against dissidents in the USSR, in: *Darbai ir dienos* 55 (2011);, pp. 29-42.

53 *Lietuvos Tarybų Socialistinės Respublikos Baudžiamasis Kodeksas*. Vilnius, 1961. *Lietuvos Tarybų Socialistinės Respublikos Baudžiamasis kodeksas. Oficialus tekstas su pakeitimais ir papildymais 1978 m. balandžio 15 d. ir su pastraipsniui susistemintos medžiagos priedu* [Criminal Code of the Lithuanian Soviet Socialist Republic. Vilnius, 1961. Criminal Code of the Lithuanian Soviet Socialist Republic. Official text with Amendments and Additions of 15 April 1978, also Featuring an Annex with Materials Systemized Article-by-Article]. Vilnius, 1978.

54 William E. Butler (1992): Crime in the Soviet Union: Early Glimpses of the True Story, in: *The British Journal of Criminology* 32, no. 2 (1992), pp. 144-59. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23638327> [06.10.2025]

55 Arvydas Anušauskas (2008): Represinė SSRS vidaus reikalų sistema Lietuvoje, *Lietuvos vidaus reikalų istorija* [Repressive System of the Interior Affairs of Lithuanian SSR: History of the Affairs of the Interior in Lithuania], Vilnius, p. 315.

56 See, for instance: *Lietuvos TSR ekonomika ir kultūra tarp Lietuvos Komunistų partijos X ir XII suvažiavimų*, Vilnius, 1960; *Lietuvos TSR ekonomika ir kultūra 1963 metais*, Vilnius, 1964;

According to the Lithuanian historian Margarita Matulytė, from the very start of the Soviet regime in Lithuania, the mass media, photography, art or public speeches and the so-called agitations of Soviet ideology were required to create the illusion that the society either already lived in, or was very close to achieving the communist phase. There was almost no place for negative social phenomena in public.⁵⁷ Therefore, the information about crime was also heavily censored.

So, crime in the legal and public discourse – starting in the 1950's, increasingly was depicted as some kind of remnant of the “old system”, still present in the socialism, but that was destined to disappear in communism. For instance, the famous scholar from the Faculty of Law of the Vilnius University Juozas Bulavas in 1953 demonstrated joy in the press that a “full victory of socialism in Soviet Lithuania” had already been reached but stressed that the need to fight with the “remnants of Capitalism” in “people’s consciousness” still existed.⁵⁸

In Lithuanian case, does not seem that the public discourse was strongly influenced by the process of destalinization – even though, according to Miriam Dobson, “Stalin’s successors saw the re-establishment of the rule of law as the first step of recovery”, and in the Russian part of the USSR, after Beria’s arrest in 1953 the media “enthusiastically” declared the new era defined by the concept of “zakonnost” (“legality”, “lawfulness”).⁵⁹

In the post-Stalinist and late-Soviet LSSR we can detect such explanations on why crime exist: a lack of communist morality, education, socialization. Criminality was described as misbehavior of those who have a negative attitude to work (commitment to work was a key value in the communist moral hierarchy); such people were shown as selfish and egoistic.⁶⁰ The punishment in this context was understood as a “lesson” to those who had no respect for common values and the

Lietuvos TSR ekonomika ir kultūra 1969 metais, Vilnius, 1970; Lietuvos TSR ekonomika ir kultūra 1977 metais, Vilnius, 1978; Lietuvos TSR ekonomika ir kultūra 1975 -1980 metais, Vilnius, 1981 [Economy and Culture of Lithuanian SSR between the Tenth and the Twelfth Congress of Lithuanian Communist Party. Vilnius, 1960; Economy and Culture of Lithuanian SSR in 1963. Vilnius, 1964; Economy and Culture of Lithuanian SSR in 1969. Vilnius, 1970; Economy and Culture of Lithuanian SSR in 1977. Vilnius, 1978; Economy and Culture of Lithuanian SSR in 1975–1980. Vilnius, 1981].

57 Margarita Matulytė (2011): *Nihil obstat. Lietuvos fotografija sovietmečiu* [Nothing Forbidden. Lithuanian Photography in the Soviet Times], Vilnius, p. 25.

58 Buržuazinio nacionalizmo krachas [Total Collapse of Bourgeoisie Nationalism], in: *Tiesa*, 1953 01 11, No. 9 (2992), p. 2.

59 Miriam Dobson (2009): *Khrushchev’s cold summer: Gulag returnees, crime, and the fate of reform after Stalin*. London, p. 5.

60 A. Korsakovas (1962): *Byla Nr. 11* [Case No. 11], in: *Tiesa*, 1962 07 06, No. 157 (5901), p. 3.

social order.⁶¹ Thus, the educational dimension of the penal system in the public discourse was very strong.

In determining the motives of crime, planned sabotage of the class enemy was also replaced with lack of diligence, commitment to a common socialist goal of building a better society, laziness.⁶² Main features in the portrait of a Soviet criminal depicted by the mass media, were a tendency to avoid work, laziness, mental illnesses, and various addictions, such as alcoholism. Therefore, the need to re-educate criminals was often stressed.⁶³

According to the mass media, the task to re-educate criminals and fight against crime had to be carried out not only by penal institutions but also by society; it was seen as a task of every citizen⁶⁴. Sometimes criminals were referred to as “social parasites”.⁶⁵

Here the phenomenon of criminalizing so-called “vagrancy” appeared – and already mentioned Article 240 of the criminal code was used. According to historian Tomas Vaiseta, the term “vagrancy”, “freeloading”, or “idleness” (in Lithuanian, “veltėdžiavimas”) meant a refusal to work. It was related to the Soviet idea that if private property has been abolished and only collective property exists, then all work is increasing the wealth of the whole society. Therefore, a person who does not work is harming the whole society – not only himself or herself. Since work for the benefit of society only existed in state-run organizations, any private economic activity outside their boundaries could be treated as evasion of work – and, therefore, criminal.⁶⁶ In such situations, were, for instance nuns (as it was not legal to run monasteries in Soviet Lithuania), political dissidents and former political prisoners (because it was difficult for them to be employed), illegal traders (as running business and selling/buying goods not from state-run shops was also banned) and other groups.

61 ibid. [Case No. 11].

62 S. Blėda: Ūgiginio tarybinis ūkis be Ūgiginių [Soviet Collective Farm in Taiga without Taiga Residents], in: *Tiesa*, 1962 07 12, No. 162 (5906), p. 2

63 Vanda Bogušienė (1975): Pažeidęs viešąją tvarką [The One who Violated the Public Order], in: *Tiesa*, 1975 07 04 d., No. 155 (9858), p. 4

64 ibid. [The One who Violated the Public Order].

65 A. Urnaitienė (1962): Veltėdės priverstos dirbti [Female Idlers were Forced to Work], in: *Tiesa*, 1962 07 13, No. 163 (5907), p. 4.

66 Tomas Vaiseta (2012): Sovietinio veltėdžiavimo fenomenas kasdienybės praktikų ir jų trajektorijų požiūriu [Phenomenon of Idleness in the Soviet Structure from the Point of View of Daily Practices and their Trajectories. Studies of the History of Lithuania], Lietuvos istorijos studijos [Studies of the History of Lithuania], t. 29, p. 115.

In general, talking about the Mass Media, a possibility to publish information about crimes and criminality was related to the type of newspaper or journal. In the late Soviet years some flexibility on this topic existed in certain periodicals, for example, the humor and satire orientated magazine *Šluota* (the Broom) though sooner to set the norms and educate the readers than to depict an objective situation related to different social problems, including criminality.

Only the academic journal *Socialistinė teisė* (Socialist law) was devoted to professional lawyers and therefore it could allow itself to be more open and present more information about crimes. Its circulation was small.⁶⁷ Hence, the journal was not easily accessible to society and therefore it hardly crossed the limits of the sphere of professional criminological discourse.

It is not surprising that such channels of the media as *Šluota* often wrote about certain types of crimes. As Aljona W. Ledenjowa demonstrated in her research, it seems that, in the late 1920s and the early 1930s already, even under Stalinist strict censorship, humor, especially caricatures, were treated as an acceptable way to discuss social problems, for instance, “blat”.⁶⁸ Thus, in the late Soviet period this tradition continued in the LSSR too.⁶⁹

However, there were crimes or other examples of deviance, which were tolerated even by the most ideology-orientated means of the Mass Media: whether in the press, television, or radio.⁷⁰ These cases were violations of traffic laws,⁷¹ “plundering of socialist property”,⁷² “speculation”, illegal trading and various activities of the illegal market.⁷³

67 Vilma Stalenytė (2016): Lietuvos kriminologijos istorijos aspektai [On some Aspects of Criminology History in Lithuania]. Master Thesis. Vilnius: Vilnius University, p. 32.

68 In Soviet Union and post-Soviet Russia, the term blat (Russian: *блат*) meant a form of corruption. Its forms are informal agreements, exchanges of services, connections, Communist Party contacts, or black-market deals. See more in: Aljona W Ledenjowa (2008): *Russia's Economy of Favors. Blat, Networking and Informal Exchange*, Cambridge University Press.

69 *ibid.*, p. 15-21.

70 Leiba Rudaševskis (1973): *Liaudies kontrolės viešumo vaizdinės priemonės* [Visual Materials for the Publicity of People's Control and Supervision], p. 6.

71 V. Chadzevičius (1962): Už eismo saugumą [For the Sake of Traffic Safety], in: *Tiesa*, 1962 07 02, No 154 (5898), p. 2.

72 B. Dovainis (1982): Kas kaltas? [Who is Guilty?], in: *Šluota*, June, 1980, No 12, p 12; Kostė Julytė/Stepas Kirvelis (1980): Procentinė mįslė [The Percentage Riddle], in: *Šluota*, August, 1980, No. 16, 7; Virgis Trumpa/Jurgis Šliumpa (1980): Aukso gysla [A Vein of Gold], in: *Šluota*, August, 1980, No 17, p. 3.

73 Petras Panavas (1980): Darinėjau jautelius [I was Butchering the Young Bulls], in: *Šluota*, January, 1980, No 2, p. 12; Sezamai atsiverk [Open Sesame], in: *Šluota*, May, 1980, No 10, p. 6-7.

According to the official canons and official rules of the late-Socialist Lithuanian public discourse, this way of depicting illegal acts, as the whole humorous nature of the *Šluota* journal, ideally suited to criticizing the shortcomings of socialist life. The guidelines of the Soviet ideology of that time depicted in various educational brochures urged journalists to criticize the problems of the Soviet society through such genres as topical satire, feuilleton, humoresque, fable.⁷⁴

However, this was not the only way of showing what the criminal justice system looked like in the public discourse of the LSSR in the post-Stalin period. Courts were also depicted in the press: for instance, trials of persons accused of “vagrancy” or “free loading”,⁷⁵ bribery, corruption and illegal trade were pictured.⁷⁶

The information about thefts from individuals, as well as about the organized criminal activities, was very scarce. Even when it was published – the focus was not on the crime itself but on very successful work of soviet institutions in their fight against such crimes.⁷⁷

So, heavy crimes in the public discourse – such as rape or murder – were very uncommon. This trend was very different from the situation in Western societies which experienced regular waves of moral panic – exaggeration of crime problem in the public discourse – at the same time.⁷⁸

Speculation was quite a common topic in the press.⁷⁹ Another popular topic, related to crime, was plundering of the state property.⁸⁰

However, according to the Soviet Lithuanian Mass Media, the situation behind the Iron Curtain was completely different. Especially the United States of America was depicted as a country, which was criminal, corrupted and which

74 Rudaševskis (1973): *Liaudies kontrolės viešumo vaizdinės priemonės* [Visual Materials for the Publicity of People's Control and Supervision], p. 19.

75 Miroslavas Mitrovičius (1980): *Pernykštis sniegas* [Last Year's Snow (*a saying in Lithuanian meaning that something is not of any relevance anymore – VU editor*)], in: *Šluota*, January, 1980, No 1, p. 12.

76 Caricature picture, in: *Šluota*, January, 1980, No 1, p. 13.

77 Ibidem; Juozas Šikšnius (1980): *Irgi „Gangsteris“* [Another 'Gangsta'], in: *Šluota*, January, 1980, No. 2, p. 10-11.

78 The term means an exaggerated depiction of crimes in the Mass Media, increasing societies' fears in the situation though in reality criminal rates were much lower. The phenomenon caused irrational panic, fear and insecurity in a certain community. See more in: Cohen (2002): *Folk Devils and Moral Panics*.

79 Vytautas Katilius, Juozas Linkus (1980): *Eik, Ieva iš Rojaus!* [Eve, Get out of Paradise!], in: *Šluota*, August, 1980, No 18, p. 3

80 A. Pelegrinda (1978): *Lazda dviem galais. Pirmoji dalis arba pirmas galas, papildantis antrąjį* [A Two-Ended Stick. Part One, or the First Final Supplementing the Second Final], in: *Šluota*, 1978 m., January, No 2, p. 5.

tolerated criminality.⁸¹ The capitalist world was defined as a paradise for criminals: according to the Soviet press, murders and shootings were an inseparable part of everyday life in the streets of American cities. The American police and authorities were shown as incapable of fighting with crime and protect the society.⁸² Texts were illustrated with diagrams showing statistical data of criminality in the USA. For instance, a graphic table showed a dramatic growth in the number of serious offences in the period between 1964 and 1974. Also, a message was spread that the police and the system of criminal prosecution in the West was so corrupted that there was only a very thin line drawn between those who broke the law and those who tried to enforce it.⁸³ Hence, the narrative of the dangerous, criminal, corrupted and immoral Western world was formed as contrast to the at least safe, though not ideal, communist society.

4 From Soviet order to post-Soviet chaos? Public criminological discourse after the declaration of Lithuania's independence

In transitional Lithuania, the functioning of public criminological discourse experienced a huge transformation from the late Soviet to the post-Soviet reality. There were debates on rule of law and legality, as the country was undergoing a legal reform, transforming authoritarian criminal justice system into the democratic one. Some articles included criticism and shortcomings of the post-Soviet transition process.⁸⁴ However, the more popular stories in the press were dedicated to depict of the enormous crime increase.

As already mentioned, during the Soviet era, crime – especially violent crime – was not a common topic in the Lithuanian public sphere. Since “Perestroika” and, especially, after Lithuania declared its independence, the trend changed radically.

Crimes, including violent ones, now were constantly depicted in the press, radio and television news and shows. Thus, crime has become one of the most important categories that shaped the public discourse of Lithuania during the

81 Nusikalstama provokacija [Provocation that should be Perceived as Crime], in: *Tiesa*, 1962 07 02, No 160 (5904), p. 3.

82 Miestuose neramu [It is not Calm in the Cities], in: *Tiesa*, 1975 07 17 d., No. 166 (9869), p. 3; Jonas Lukoševičius (1975): Kai triukšmauja... policija [When the Noise-Maker is ... the Police], in: *Tiesa*, 1975 07 27, No. 174 (9877), p. 3.

83 *ibid.* [When the Noise-Maker is ... the Police]

84 See, for Instance: Kazimieras Motieka (1998): Teisinių nihilizmą skatina aukščiausioji valdžia [Legal Nihilism is Encouraged by Supreme Powers], *Lietuvos rytas*, 1998 06 16, Nr. 138, p. 4.

transitional period. As new cultural myths and new norms of criminal discourse were not there yet – crime was suddenly transformed from a nearly-taboo topic to the uncensored omnipotent virtual reality. While new ethical norms of the public sphere were being defined, before new cultural taboos were created – the post-Soviet Lithuanian public discourse was characterized by direct depiction of the brutal reality of crime. Uncensored photographs of crime scenes and victims' corpses, rarely found in the public discourse of today's Lithuania, were pretty common. Newspaper columns devoted to information about crimes were popular and aroused public interest.⁸⁵

The major Lithuanian newspapers of that period started publishing criminal news on a regular basis. Organized crime became a very popular topic in this newly-emerging criminal genre of post-Soviet Lithuanian Mass Media. For example, an article on 1993, August 3 in the newspaper *Respublika* talks about the “mafia war” that is taking place in Klaipėda. This article is aimed to create the impression that law enforcement officers are powerless against criminals.⁸⁶

The content of criminal news also included statements and depictions of victimization risks, faced by people who did not belong to the criminal networks. For instance, *Lietuvos aidas* wrote about small business owners, under constant threats of robberies and racketeering.⁸⁷

Similar trends can be seen in *Respublika* – the newspaper, for example, informed its readers about attempts to place bombs near newly-privatized properties, owned by small businesses such as *Café Eglė* in Vilnius.⁸⁸ While *Lietuvos rytas* on April 14th, 1993 described a series of explosions in Vilnius,⁸⁹ on July 19th and 31st, 1991, it wrote about thefts and robberies, on April 28th, 1990 and June 16th, 1990 – about rapes,⁹⁰ internal human body organs.⁹¹ These are just few examples of common and well-established practices of criminal news reporting in this newspaper.

85 See more in: A. Dobryninas (2001): *Virtuali nusikaltimų tikrovė* [The Virtual Reality of Crimes], Vilnius: Eurigmas.

86 Andrius Lingys, (1993): Klaipėda: mirties ruletė gailėsčio nepripažįsta [The City of Klaipėda: The Roulette of Death Knows no Mercy], in: *Respublika* [The Republic], 1993 08 03.

87 Tamsioji gyvenimo pusė [The Dark Side of Life]. *Lietuvos Aidas* [The Echo of Lithuania], 1995 02 02 Nr. 23 p. 10.

88 *Respublika*, 1993 04 21.

89 Ainis Gurevičius (1993): „Iš Šiaulių sproгимų banga atsirito ir iki Lietuvos sostinės“ [A Wave of Explosions has Rolled into the Capital City of Lithuania], 1993 04 14.

90 *Lietuvos rytas* [The Morning of Lithuania], 1990 04 28, 1990 06 16, 1991 06 19, 1991 06 31.

91 „Inkstus parduoda pigiai ir brangiai“ [Kidneys are being Sold on the Cheap – or Expensively], in: *Respublika*, 1994 02 08.

These depictions indirectly signaled to the readers that, from now on, anyone can become a violent crime victim. This trend was very different from the Soviet one and such public discourse deeply affected the state of the individual.

As the previous research demonstrated, interviewed research participants felt relatively safe in the Soviet era and did not worry about crime – even if this feeling was not necessarily based on empirical reality, but rather on the construction of the Soviet public criminological discourse. However, in the 1990s, these individuals lost their emotional comfort. They became tense, fearful, and began to easily imagine themselves as potential victims and targets of criminals.⁹²

Being a victim of crime indeed became a frequent experience in Lithuania: no matter the social class, social status, wealth and gender. In 1994 the *Lithuanian Workers' Union* and the *Vilnius Workers' Union* wrote a letter to the President of Lithuania, the Parliament, the prosecutor general, and the minister of the interior. They described the horror of the victims and the poor reaction of the criminal justice system's officers in the case of a recent bus hijacking and the robbery of passengers in one of the busiest Lithuanian motorways. The workers in the letter also mentioned how terrible and unsafe they felt being potential victims of robberies and other violent crimes: the tension was felt in public spaces, at work or even at home.⁹³ Of course, the attention to crime, expressed by the Mass Media, strongly contributed to these trends – and the lost feeling of personal safety and security.

So, in the Mass Media, what was previously hidden, masked or only partially depicted, with largely compromised narratives, and within the framework of Soviet ideological myths – suddenly became very common in the post-Soviet world. No wonder there were waves of moral panic related to such an open and shocking portrayal of crimes in public.

On the one hand, the public criminological discourse, at least partially, reflected the empirical reality. On the other hand, the power of Lithuanian mafia was often overemphasized.

As the criminologist and law expert Viktoras Justickis observed in his research, some myths about the power of organized criminal associations did not correspond to reality. For example, in Justickas opinion, the media created a myth about the

92 See more in: Kareniauskaitė (2017): *Crime and Punishment in Lithuanian SSR*, pp. 298-299.

93 The letter from the Lithuanian Workers' Union and the Vilnius Workers' Union to the president of the Republic of Lithuania, the Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania, the prosecutor general, and the minister of the interior, signed by the chair, Č. Kuliešius, 1 September 1994. *Modern Archives of the State of Lithuania*, col. 79, inv. 1, file 11, p. 34.

exceptional power of H. Daktaras, the leader of the Kaunas gang *Daktarai* (the “Doctors”). When the leader of the gang was arrested, the police, the media and the public expected a huge mafia resistance and fight with law enforcement. Daktaras himself and his gang formed and supported the myth that they control the situation in Kaunas; that after H. Daktara’s arrest, a war between different gangs will begin, and the criminals will try to free their leader. Many believed these claims, but it did not happen.⁹⁴

Of course, the public discourse in 1990s Lithuania was also not possible without the depictions of corruption, also the links between political and economic elites and criminals – a widespread phenomenon in the transitional societies in the whole post-Soviet sphere.⁹⁵

Lietuvos Aidas wrote about corruption, money laundering and other forms of crime, related to the economic and political elites. However, this newspaper informed the public not only about economic, financial crimes and corruption, but also about the state’s efforts to fight against it.⁹⁶

Some newspapers went as far as trying to link political elite with organized crime, showing Lithuania as a “failed state”, where political and legal system is not functioning. *Respublika* was very focused on such assumptions. There were cases where the newspaper attempted to indirectly promote the idea, that there are links between the Lithuanian political elite and the criminal world. Misleading article headlines were used for such purposes. For example, in 1998, May 9th, the article “Double murder in Vilnius: connections with G. Dekanidze and the president’s team” appeared on the front page of *Respublika*. It tried (falsely and manipulatively) to draw indirect connections between Valdas Adamkus, Lithuanian President who just took an office, and the organized crime, whose representative G. Dekanidze was.⁹⁷ Similar trends are observed in *Lietuvos rytas* – for example, mentioning Seimas, Lithuanian parliament.⁹⁸

94 Viktoras Justickis (2001): Organizuotas nusikalstamumas. Ekonominiai pagrindai [Organized Crime. Economic Background], in: *Jurisprudencija*, t. 20(12), p. 25.

95 See, for instance: Mark Galeotti (2018): *The Vory: Russia’s Super Mafia*, London, New Haven.

96 Vyriausybė bandys kovoti su pinigų plovimu [The Government will Attempt to Fight against Money Laundering], in: *Lietuvos Aidas*, 1995 02 02 Nr. 23 p. 10.

97 „Dviguba žmogžudystė Vilniuje: ryšiai su G. Dekanidze ir prezidentūra [Double Murder in Vilnius: Connections with G. Dekanidze and the Presidential Palace], in: *Respublika*, 1998 05 09, Nr. 105 (2430), p. 1.

98 Milda Kuizinaite (2000): Vagys plėšė Seimo garažo stogą [Thieves were Tearing away the Roof of the Parliament’s Garage], in: *Lietuvos rytas*, 2000 m. kovo 12 d., Nr. 134, p. 3.

The Lithuanian Mass Media also tended from time to time to criticize the criminal justice system itself.⁹⁹ The press also highlighted cases, where criminals pretended to be law enforcement officers¹⁰⁰.

Thus, not the constructive criticism of young Lithuanian state's flaws and corruption – but rather negative, in Dobrynina's terms, the “virtual reality of crime”¹⁰¹ was in some cases constructed.

The trends of crime depiction of post-Soviet Lithuania had mixed effects. On the one hand, by publicly announcing crime and corruption cases, the right to information was finally implemented. Criticizing state and even law enforcement agencies is also considered a democratic right. However, on the other hand, the amount of this information and style of its presentation sometimes discredited the new Lithuanian criminal justice system in the eyes of the public and led to growing distrust, feelings of loss of security and control. The belief appeared that the Lithuanian government is incapable of solving the crime problem.¹⁰²

This trend also reduced trust in the rule of law itself – and in the belief that the criminal justice system is capable of solving of the crime problem and ensuring public safety. It was dangerous. As Galeotti's research has shown, the distrust of the criminal justice system in Russia in the 1990s fueled the popularization of the idea that only authoritarian state control could reduce crime and restore public safety. According to this author, the spread of such thinking in the political elite and society was one of the reasons for the collapse of democracy in Russia.¹⁰³

It is also important to emphasize that the “moral panic” outbreaks due to the most brutal and shocking mafia crimes in Lithuania in the 1990s diverted the public's attention from the more hidden types of violence and crimes committed not by the organized groups. Not enough attention has been paid to non-organized crime types, such as domestic violence.¹⁰⁴

However, not all post-Soviet changes had only negative effects. For example, a shift in the public definition and depiction of crime in post-Soviet Lithuania

99 See, for instance: Vytautas Bubnys (1998): *Temidės debesys pavasariškoj padangėj* [Clouds of Themis in the Spring Sky], in: *Ūkininko patarėjas* [Farmer's Counselor], 1998 03 10, Nr. 29 (711), p. 3.

100 *Pakelėse siautėja uniformuoti plėšikai* [Robbers in Uniform are on a Rampage on the Roadside], in: *Laikinoji sostinė* [The Provisional Capital], 1998 01 10, Nr. 7 (592), p. 4.

101 A. Dobryninas (2001): *Virtuali nusikaltimų tikrovė* [The Virtual Reality of Crimes].

102 Gintaras Serafinas (1998): *Policinėje visuomenėje – kiekvienai šeimai po policininką* [In the Police Society: A Policeman to Supervise Every Family], in: *Veidas*, 1998 04 09, p. 29.

103 Galeotti (2018): *The Vory: Russia's Super Mafia*.

104 A. Gutauskas et al: *Changing Typology of Organised Crime in a Post-Socialist Lithuania (the Late 1980s–Early 2000s)*, p. 202.

helped, at least partially, to change some stereotypes and negative attitudes towards previously marginalized groups – for example, political prisoners or homosexual persons. This trend reflected the processes of transitional justice. For example, a shift in the public discourse, brought by decriminalization of homosexual relations between men in 1993, enabled to start publishing new press, dedicated to the LGBT community.¹⁰⁵

According to researchers, in the late 1990s and early 2000s, journalists, employees of the criminal prosecution system and politicians increasingly claimed that the threat of organized crime to the state and society was significantly decreasing.¹⁰⁶

As Aleksandras Dobryninas has mentioned in one interview, journalists also learned how to describe crimes in more subtle way, without exaggerating it and causing “moral panic” waves. And as we see from the current Lithuanian public discourse – mass crime and omnipresent gang violence today is rather seen as the exotic phenomenon of the past, post-Soviet period than the current reality.¹⁰⁷

Conclusions

During the Soviet era, crime as a phenomenon was not a common topic in the Lithuanian public sphere. Even when depictions of various types of deviance became public – stories about crimes and criminals were constructed according to a

105 Two magazines dedicated to the LGBT community were published in Lithuania in the 1990s – *Naglis* (1993–1997) and *Amsterdamos* (1994–1999). They announced news from Lithuania and other countries relevant to the community, informed about HIV prevention and safe sex, answered questions related to homosexuality, announced events, gave advice to the readers. See more in: *Žurnalistikos enciklopedija* [The Journalism Encyclopedia], *Vilnius*: Pradai, 1997, p. 349; Ugnius Antanavičius: „Amsterdamos“ ir „Naglis“: kaip atrode bei apie ką rašė pirmieji Lietuvos gėjų žurnalai? [‘Amsterdamos’ and ‘Naglis’: What did the Earliest Lithuanian Gay Magazines Look Like, and what did they Write?], accessible online: <<https://www.15min.lt/gyvenimas/naujiena/ar-zinai/amsterdamos-ir-naglis-kaip-atrode-ir-apie-ka-rase-pirmieji-lietuvos-geju-zurnalai-1634-1144402>> [accessed 18. 10. 2023]; Aleksas Kudis (ed., 1993-1997): *Naglis: laikraštis gėjams ir jų draugams* [Naglis: A Newspaper for Gay People and their Friends]. Vilnius: Lietuvos AIDS centras.

106 Gutauskas et al.: *Changing Typology of Organised Crime in a Post-Socialist Lithuania*, p. 202.

107 Jurga Bakaitė/Tomas Vaitelė (2025): „Ketvirtą naktį liejasi kraujas“: kaip Lietuva prieš 30 metų lipo iš nusikalstamumo duobės [“Blood is being Shed on a Fourth Night in a Row”]: How Lithuania was Climbing out of a Pit of Crime 30 Years ago], on: *LRT*, 2025 09 27, https://www.lrt.lt/naujienos/lietuvoje/2/2693607/ketvirta-nakti-liejasi-kraujas-kaip-lietuva-pries-30-metu-lipo-is-nusikalstamumo-duobes?srsId=AfmBOoqQR5BFNpX6ZfDrSDQeiJfhe4tJkXRvcLe-BcwUY4kcyb_KxL [21.10.2025]

certain ideological context, placed in the framework of ideological discourse. The most common in public were stories about crimes that do not involve violence, such as economic crimes, embezzlement of state property, and speculation.

The Stalinist public discourse provided the image of criminal as the Soviet state enemy. The post-Stalinist discourse imagined criminal, as someone with a lack of communist morality, education, socialization – or who is mentally ill. It was depicted in the press that within USSR and LSSR crime is vanishing due to the “natural causes” – building of communism, where the very reason of crime phenomenon, social inequality, disappears. Therefore, in Soviet press, crime was depicted as the huge problem of the capitalist “West”.

In post-Soviet Lithuania, public criminological discourse was liberated from the censorship. It had both positive and negative consequences. On the one hand, the real crime numbers and the broad spectrum of criminal activities now could be seen. Also, the previously criminalized and marginalized groups got back their voice and agency – it contributed to the human rights development in the period of transitional justice. On the other hand, in the 90s Lithuanian press created “moral panic” – exaggerating the power and impact of the organized crime (which was a real problem then, however). This exaggeration caused doubts in Lithuanian state’s and criminal justice system’s ability to successfully restore public safety without turning to non-democratic and authoritarian methods of crime control.

It seems that today Lithuania is depicted as safe and relatively low crime zone in the local public discourse. And the concept of criminal, that occupies large amount of the mass media criminal discourse, is the war criminal – as Lithuania is the big supporter of Ukraine and actively follows Russia’s aggression against it.

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