

When a 2015 petition demanded the removal of the Vilnius plaque honouring Noreika, Lithuania's Genocide and Resistance Research Centre defended Noreika's hero status and blamed Russia for trying to besmirch his name.

Foti came to the attention of Grant Gochin, a Jewish American of Lithuanian background, who has written to Lithuania's parliament protesting the whitewashing of Noreika and of Lithuanian officer Kazys Skirpa.

GOCHIN has submitted a detailed report on Noreika, with an affidavit from Foti, to the Genocide and Resistance Research Centre.

This month (January), Gochin began legal action in Lithuania's Regional Administrative Court for Noreika to be stripped of national-hero status and for street signs, memorials and a stone plaque on a main street of Vilnius to be removed. The writ is being opposed in court by the state-run genocide centre.

Skirpa became a Nazi puppet prime minister on whose watch some 5000 Jews were murdered. He emigrated to the US in 1949, and died there 30 years later.

Gochin has also drawn attention to horrific massacres perpetrated by Lithuanian paramilitaries in neighbouring Belarus against Jews and Belarusians – crimes so horrendous that after one massacre, the local Nazi German commissar described the violence to his superiors as “almost equal to sadism” and asked to be excluded from future actions of that kind. The Lithuanian commander behind these bloodbaths, Colonel Juozas Kristaponis, also holds posthumous national honours bestowed by Lithuania.

BEN-MOSHE told *The AJN* that while the specifics of the Noreika/General Storm case are unique – a Lithuanian family member admitting their relative was a mass murderer of Jews – in other ways the issue is typical of

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Associate Professor Danny Ben-Moshe,
Australian documentary filmmaker

Noreika was administrator of Siauliai district, and according to the centre, his “writings” encouraged locals to transfer Jewish possessions to social institutions.

“Historical documents show otherwise,” Gochin told *The AJN* in 2017, alleging Noreika's “writings” were in fact orders – and “the property and funds obtained were used for the Nazi war industry ... The centre in its finding omits these circumstances and documents.”

Gochin also objected to findings Noreika had no role “with organising or carrying out the mass murder of Jews”, stating it “demonstrates an inability to come to terms with the events of the Holocaust”, in which, he noted, dispossession was a prelude to genocide.

Skirpa told countrymen to encourage Jews to flee but his threats of harsh punishment to Jews who remained behind have been omitted from the official record.



Silvia Foti visiting a friend in Vilnius, Lithuania, July 2013. Photo: Ina Budryte/via JTA

the broader situation in Lithuania: someone being heralded a hero because of their genuine anti-Soviet activities, which often leads to a whitewash of their involvement in the mass murder of Jews.

“The fact that the government-organised Genocide Research Centre, which is supposed to address these historic issues, continues to defend General Storm is indicative of the problem. If they are the policemen, the criminals will never be caught,” he said.

That Foti “has spoken honestly about her grandfather's past shows that acceptance of the truth is possible. This is necessary if Lithuanian-Jewish relations are ever to advance with true reconciliation”, said Ben-Moshe.

“I have nothing but admiration for the granddaughter candidly and honestly confronting the past, despite cultural, family and community attitudes that opposed what she was doing,” the filmmaker added.

Ben-Moshe noted that Noreika was “not some local collaborator caught up in the tide of the Nazi invasion and Jew killing. Her was a leader of the Lithuanian Activist Front who were allies of the Nazis before the Nazi invasion, had their own explicitly antisemitic policies, and whose members killed Jews independent of the Nazis before the German invasion”.

“Noreika moved into the home of Jewish victims, in the same way that locals moved into the home of my family who were killed by locals in Lithuania,” he said.

“We descendants don't want to move back to those homes,” he explained, “but we want the acknowledgment of who did what to the people who lived in those homes. Over 70 years have passed since these atrocities. It's time for Lithuania to come to terms with its past. The over 90 per cent of Lithuanian Jews killed during the Holocaust deserve that.”



Aftermath of the Kovno, Lithuania (or Kaunas) 'garage' massacre in June of 1941, perpetrated by pro-German Lithuanians. Photo: Public domain



Main entrance to the Ghetto of Vilnius in Lithuania, during WWII. Photo: Wikipedia

Before the court

A LITHUANIAN judge has postponed the precedent-setting trial in which US citizen Grant Gochin is demanding that a state museum end its glorification of a deceased Nazi collaborator.

The case is thought to be the first in which civil servants intend to publicly defend in court the actions and reputation of an alleged collaborator.

Lawyers representing the museum said they needed more time to review materials relevant to the case, which involves the late Jonas Noreika.

The state-funded museum, known as the Centre for the Study of the Genocide and Resistance of the Residents of Lithuania, focuses primarily on the persecution of Lithuanians under Soviet occupation.

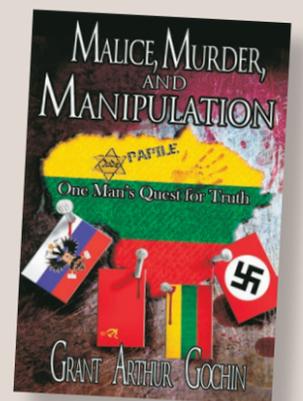
Last year, Gochin of California sued the museum for erecting a plaque honouring Noreika, a local anti-communist hero who died while in Soviet custody.

Efraim Zuroff, the Simon Wiesenthal Centre's Eastern Europe director, has argued that Noreika became a mass murderer after his appointment in 1941 as head of the Siauliai region under the German Nazi occupation.

In documents submitted to the court, the centre claimed Noreika's actions cannot be judged posthumously and that in any case there is no evidence to suggest he perpetrated war crimes.

The Simon Wiesenthal Centre, the Jewish community of Lithuania and one of Noreika's grandchildren, Silvia Foti, dispute this. The trial is set to begin in March.

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Grant Gochin and his book *Malice, Murder and Manipulation* (top).