

Russian Military Camps for Lithuanian Children

In late 2014 a scandal made [headlines](#) in Lithuania that young Lithuanian Russian-speaking students are being sent to Russian military youth camps. This incident reached attention of the highest government officials and the [Intelligence community](#) in Lithuania. Lithuanian society was alerted and saw this as a propagandist maneuver to indoctrinate the young member of Lithuanian Russian-speaking community. In 2017, the mayor of Plungė (town in Western Lithuania) [publicly apologized](#) for allowing Lithuanian-speaking students to go to one of these camps. This story was widely heard in Lithuania and the it is still ongoing. The [Vilnius Institute of Policy Analysis](#) (VIPA) presents you the insights of this story and provides a better look of what these military camps actually are.

Youth Camp Soyuz

The youth camps Soyuz, Nasledniki Pobedy (RU: Союз, Наследники Победы; EN: The Union, The Heirs of the Victory) started as early as 2017 and are being organized annually. Their [official website](#) described these camps as:

“Soyuz is a International Youth Educational Event of Military Sports Organizations and Cadet Corps. The program of patriotic education, developed by Afghanistan's veterans, was recognized by the authorities of Russian Federation and its allies, but was condemned by some members of NATO.”

The motto of the camp is “When we are united – we are invincible”. (RU: Когда мы едины — мы непобедимы). The camp invites students from the post-Soviet countries to come for a 10 day sports and educational program in various cities in the post-Soviet countries. The camp emphasizes military routine, cultural and educational programs. And this is where the main danger comes from – the Russian official historical narratives are not objective. As Alexander Dugin [puts it](#) – Russia has its own special Russian truth.

Another important detail is the list of the organizers and financial supporters. In the long list of names organizations with a strong historical and cultural bias can be found: “Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation”, “Foundation for the Promotion of Patriotic Education of Youth and Preservation of the Succession of Russian Military Intelligence Generations “Loyalty to the Fatherland” and “Regional public association for the preservation and strengthening of traditional spiritual and moral values, culture and patriotism “Dignity”.

Спонсоры:

Организаторы: Правительство Кыргызской республики, Региональное общественное движение поддержки защитников Родины «Доблесть Отечества» (Россия), Федерация воинского многоборья «Русь».

При поддержке Министерства обороны Российской Федерации, Министерства обороны Кыргызской республики.

Партнеры:

РОССИЯ: Фонд содействия патриотическому воспитанию молодежи и сохранению преемственности поколений русской военной разведки «Верность Отчизне»; Всероссийское общественное движение «За сбережение народа»; Федерация спортивной борьбы России; Союз десантников России; Общероссийский общественный благотворительный фонд «Достоинство России»; Некоммерческая организация Фонд развития «Институт евразийских исследований»; Региональное общественное объединение сохранения и укрепления традиционных духовных и нравственных ценностей, культуры и патриотизма «Достоинство»; Центр духовно-нравственного, гражданского воспитания «Национальное достояние»; ОО «Ветеран вооруженных сил города Великие Луки и Великолукского района»; Московский государственный институт (университет) международных отношений МГИМО; А так же: ОАО «РОСНЕФТЬ»; Фабрика «ОружейникЪ» г. Златоуст; ООО "Карго Транс Можайск"; ООО «Транслоджикс»; ООО "Самарский завод нефтяного резервуарного оборудования" (ООО "СЗНРО"); Некоммерческое партнерство «Центр содействия и социальной поддержки военнослужащих и ветеранов военной службы «Молния» (НП ЦСВВС «Молния»); МОО антитеррора «Вымпел-В».

Кыргызстан:

Россотрудничество в Кыргызской Республике, ЭкоИсламикБанк, Рус Авиагрупп, Ассоциация Альфа-антитеррор, Аскар Салымбеков, Союз российских соотечественников «Русский мир», Компания «Новый город», отель Рич.

Snapshot Source – soldatru.ru

When the story surfaced in 2014, the media talked about Lithuanian students being sent to Soyuz-2013 camp in Odessa, Ukraine and Soyuz-2014 camp in Russia. Two main Lithuanian schools were cited sending students to the youth camps: Vilnius Sofia Kovalevskaya high-school and Vilnius Kochalov gymnasium. According to the [reports](#), in 2014 at least 10 pupils from Vilnius area were sent to the camp. Another incident surfaced in 2017, when the mayor of a Lithuanian town Plungė publicly [apologized](#) for letting Lithuanian speaking students go to a youth camp in Russia and admitted that these camps are propagandistic. The exact numbers of Lithuanian students that were taking part in these camps were not revealed by the Intelligence community, but it was confirmed that both Russian-speaking and Lithuanian speaking students were present at the camps.

Lithuania's Response

In 2014, the situation was not only widely addressed on the media, but also commented by high officials. Lithuanian President Dalia Grybauskaitė [declared](#) that these youth camps are a good example how third party countries are trying to influence Lithuania's youth and urged the schools and students to be careful. At the same time, the [Minister of Education](#) argued that this is an individual decision of the students' parents and that Ministry of Education is not going to actively deny students the right to travel. The control of the schools Lithuanian State Security Department was reluctant to comment a lot on the situation, but assured that this is not the first try to influence Lithuanian youth.

Neither the children, nor they teachers have broken the Lithuanian laws. Both Ministry of Education and State Security Department agreed that these individual decisions are made by the parents and the right of free movement cannot be limited in any way. Nonetheless, the Minister mentioned that a stricter control school syllabus will be implemented to [ensure](#) that the kids are not being influenced by propaganda in schools. Prosecutors [stopped](#) the pre-trial investigation on the youth camps on January 2017, no laws were broken by the schools or the students.

Analysis

As mentioned before, the [official website](#) of the youth camp mentions the camps being organized since 2007 up to 2017. Since the camps are of similar nature with very similar agendas, we took a closer look to one of them – [Soyuz 2013](#), Odessa.

One of the first things that pop up opening the Soyuz 2013 folder is a variety of the schools and activities that will be available during the camp. The diplomatic games, school of extreme and military medicine and the school of military scouts catches attention and raises questions.

Школы «Союза» откроют свои двери, для участников Сбора - представителей молодежи стран бывшего Советского Союза ([подробнее >>](#)):



Snapshot Source – [soldatru.ru](#)

A large [folder](#) of photos and videos from the camp is attached to every event that was organized. These official visual aids gave us a chance to better understand what was happening in these events.

Military Training

A large portion of the activities in the camp were physical. All the children were dressed in military uniforms, closely resembling the Russian military. Part of the uniform was the traditional Russian Navy, Marine and Airborne Troops' undershirt – Telnishka (тельняшка) and the Ribbon of Saint George (Георгиевская ленточка) – an old Russian military symbol actively used by Russian-led separatists in Ukraine.

As we can see from the pictures, children and especially boys were competing in military games, such as wrestling, doing pushups in formations, running and completing tasks with weapons.



Image Source – scorher.ru

Amongst the pictures jousting, knife throwing and marksmanship competitions were observed. It is important to note that girls were involved in most of these activities as well.



Image Source – scorher.ru

An interesting, yet important observation is that the weapons that were by children in the camp were the famous Russian Soviet submachine guns - PPSH-41 (Пистолет-пулемёт Шпагина). – iconic weapons of the 'Great Patriotic War'. This observation will be discussed more deeply in the following part.



Image Source – scorher.ru

Historical Perspective

The very idea of the 'Great Patriotic War' in Russia is highly subjective and is used in making of the Russian narrative. According to this concept USSR was a victim and a victor of the WWII, completely disregarding historical facts and war crimes inflicted by USSR.

As we can see from the photos, this theme was prevalent throughout the camp. Children were dressing up in soviet soldier, NKVD uniforms and reenacting scenes from the WWII. Soviet symbols were prevailing throughout the camp and the narrative portrays Nazi Germans as the nemesis of the glorious Soviet soldiers.



Image Source – scorher.ru

On the last days of the camp, a big WWII reenactment was made on the beach. Groups of soldiers were showing a victory of brave Soviet soldiers against the evil Nazis. The NKVD element was prevalent in this reenactment as well.



Image Source – scorher.ru

There are no videos of the classes or discussions taking place during the camp, but in the video a lot of educational posters with WWII thematic were visible.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NshZFidVa_I&t=181s

Video source - [YouTube](https://www.youtube.com)

There is little doubt, that the historical narrative presented in the camps was very subjective and pro-Soviet. By the looks of it, the official footage from Soyuz 2013 reveals its aim – a certain education of students from the post-Soviet countries.

Lithuanian Students

A few official photos on the website confirm the presence of Lithuanian students. During the march in Odessa, students wore the traditional clothes and carried the

flags of their countries. A Lithuanian flag was observed next to a female student dressed in outfit resembling Lithuanian official clothes.

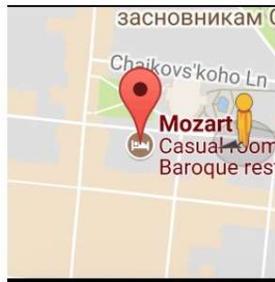


Image Source – scorher.ru, Map Source (Lazheronivs'ka St) – [GoogleMaps](https://www.google.com/maps).

The same student was seen posing in the square next to a memorial and looking at local souvenirs. The identity of the student is not going to be revealed.



Image Source – scorher.ru

A few other photos were found of the camp participants presenting their works and ideas on stage. These photos once again confirm the presence of Lithuanian students in the camp. It is known that both male and female students were present in the camp.

Furthermore, Estonian and Latvian students apparently were also present amongst the participants. Whether the students were native Russian speakers is unknown.



Image Source – scorher.ru

Conclusions

The scandalous story of Lithuanian students in Russian military youth camps is not yet over. Even though, the court ruled that no laws were broken when these children were sent and the State Security Department took no active actions to stop it, this remains a threat for Lithuanian youth.

It is not surprising that Russian speakers from the ex-Soviet Union are being invited to these camps. It is vital for the current Kremlin regime to hold the dispersed Russian speakers under their information dome. Nonetheless, the fact that native Lithuanian speakers were invited, presents the fact that Kremlin's ideological reach is far.

Lithuanian government decided to take soft measures against this propagandist threat, by urging teachers to be more vigilant, to think twice before sending of the

students to these events. Apparently, Kremlin once again found a grey zone to manipulate in without activating the state's judiciary system. The fight for Russian speaker's hearts and minds continues.