

# SPANISH CIVIL WAR PARTICIPANTS IN THE INTERNMENT CAMPS IN FRANCE: LATVIAN CASE (1939–1941)

*Ginta Ieva Bikše*

Mg. hist., PhD Candidate, research assistant, Institute of Latvian History, University of Latvia

In early 1939, after retreat from Catalonia, more than 50 Latvians, former participants of the Spanish Civil War, crossed Spanish–French border and ended up in internment camps in France. The aim of the current article is to give an overview and analyse the experience of Latvian men in internment camps. The article focuses on social activities and mutual relations, living conditions and their differences in internment camps in Saint-Cyprien, Argelès-sur-Mer, Gurs, Le Vernet etc., considering the beginning of the Second World War and the establishment of Vichy regime. Furthermore, the attitude of Latvian authorities towards Latvian citizens and possibilities for Latvian men to depart from the internment camps in France have been considered.

*Key words:* Spanish Civil War, internment camps in France, communism, Latvian internees in France.

In the middle of February 1939, several dozens of Latvians found themselves among thousands of former Spanish Civil War participants and Spanish refugees in improvised internment camps in France. Uncertain about their future, they had their memories of participating in the Spanish Civil War. Most of these Latvians were part of about 35 000 volunteers (Casanova 2010, 233–235) that joined the International Brigades. After 21 September 1938, when the Prime Minister of the Spanish Republic Juan Negrín had announced the withdrawal of foreign volunteers, many former members of the International Brigades left Spain to return to their country of origin, however, others faced the reality that they were not welcomed back (Gildea et al. 2020, 24–25). Latvians were amongst those foreigners whose departure from Spain was problematic, thus, many of

them were entrapped in a waiting phase in Catalonia and reapplied to support the last Republican retreating defensive actions. Latvia was participating in the Non-Intervention Committee, therefore since 23 February 1937, Latvians were prohibited from taking part in the conflict (Bikše 2021, 83–85). Since 15 May 1934, Latvia was governed by an authoritarian dictator Kārlis Ulmanis. His regime was relatively mild, based on nationalism and did not support any radicalism, however, anarchism, communism and socialism were considered as notably distant ideas (Butulis et al. 2017, 9; Stranga 2013, 354; Ščerbinskis et al. 2012, 9). Many Latvians who participated in the conflict were members of Communist parties or its satellites (Bikše 2021, 91), hence – undesirable for Kārlis Ulmanis regime.

In early 1939, almost 500 000 people, including refugees and fighters, crossed the Spanish–French border. Several thousand more left Central Spain during the last month of the conflict (Peschanski 2000, 40). France was not prepared for such a considerable influx of refugees from Spain, and was not willing to permit the former Republican soldiers and fighters to walk free on its soil. Consequently, French politicians decided to open internment camps for “undesirables”. At the beginning of March 1939, there were about 226 000 internees in France. At the time, out of five opened camps the largest were Saint-Cyprien with 90 000 people and Argelès (Argelès-sur-Mer) with 77 000 internees (Grynberg 2013, Chapter 2). Historians have pointed out that internment was not only inhumane, but also an inappropriate solution to deal with the fear of communism. These grim, confined spaces increased the resentment of many internees towards Western politics and strengthened their solidarity and beliefs, as well as gave time and platform for exchange of transnational experiences (Gildea et al. 2020, 49–50). Some of Latvian internees came from the USSR and were defenders of the Soviet policy, furthermore, a lot of interned Latvian citizens later were fervent supporters of communist rule in Latvian territory and Latvian SSR – the administrative territory of USSR that was created after the occupation of Latvia on 17 June 1940 –, some of them were useful figures in communist propaganda. Due to the scope of the article, the question of citizenship of each individual has not been detailed (also due to different reasons and periods when some of them lost their Latvian citizenship), instead describing all of them as they mostly felt – as Latvians (people related to Latvia), – and pointing out those who came from the USSR and their role within the Latvian group in the internment

camps. Not only Latvian participation in the Spanish Civil War<sup>1</sup>, but also the focus of this article – Latvian internment in camps in France – have not yet been thoroughly investigated. One of the most relevant publications that contains memoirs of Latvian internment in camps after the Spanish Civil War “Latvijas cīnītāji Spānijā: 1936–1939: atmiņas un dokumenti” (“Latvian Fighters in Spain: 1936–1939: Memories and Documents”) (Ziemeļis 1966) was published in Latvian SSR as a communist propaganda material that needed to have “educational nature”, thus omitting the less-flattering facts to Soviet history (LNA-LVA, PA-200–7–38, 15–18). In a recent publication, Latvian official attitude towards the interned Latvian citizens and former Spanish Civil War participants, as well as their conditions in France have been analysed through the perspective of one collection of documents (Bikše 2020, 149–171), however, it is not conclusive regarding Latvian internment.

The aim of the article is to give an overview and analyse the experience of Latvian men in internment camps in France, by focusing on Latvians’ social activities and mutual relations, the attitude of Latvian authorities towards Latvian citizens, living conditions and their differences in diverse camps and periods, considering the beginning of the Second World War,

---

<sup>1</sup> Some published materials on the Latvian participation include, f. e. the memoirs “Latvijas cīnītāji Spānijā: 1936–1939: atmiņas un dokumenti”; more recently, there has been an attempt to investigate the participation of Latvian volunteers by Ignacio de la Torre, however, the lack of Latvian language proficiency and disregard of many sources in Latvian has led to numerous factual errors and the overestimation of Latvian participation, Ignacio de la Torre (2016). Latvian Volunteers in the Spanish Civil War. In: *Humanities and Social Sciences Latvia* 24, 2016, No. 1, pp. 51–77. Some publications have focused on specific Latvians that participated in the Spanish Civil War, f. e. Bikše, Ginta Ieva (2021). Latvijas iedzīvotājs – Spānijas pilsoņu kara (1936–1939) dalībnieks: rakstnieka Žaņa Grīvas (Folmaņa) piemērs. *Latvijas Vēstures Institūta Žurnāls*, Nr. 1 (113), 71.–92. lpp.; Gorchakov, Ovidii (2004). Ian Berzin – komandarm GRU. St. Petersburg; The author of this article has given a brief overview of Latvian participation in the article Bērziņa, Ginta Ieva (2016). Latvijas un Spānijas attiecības (1936–1940): Spānijas pilsoņu kara konteksts. *Latvijas Universitātes Žurnāls. Vēsture*, Nr. 2 (97), 68.–88. lpp.; of late, a more detailed overview of Latvian participation in the medical aid to the Spanish Republic: Bikše, Ginta Ieva (2021). Participation of Latvian Volunteers in Medical Aid to the Spanish Republic during the Spanish Civil War (1936–1939). *Latvijas Universitātes Žurnāls. Vēsture*, Nr. 11/12, 76.–88. lpp., and is investigating and planning to publish a more thorough investigation on the overall Latvian participation in the Spanish Civil War upon finishing the doctoral thesis.

the surrender of France, and the establishment of Vichy regime, as well as by considering the length of stay and departure from camps. The author emphasizes that this article does not aim to directly analyse Latvian participation in the Spanish Civil War, of which further investigations are needed. The article also does not cover the internment of a couple of Latvian women who faced much lighter conditions. The main sources consist of manuscript from the fund of Institute of Social Policy Research of the Central Committee of the Latvian Communist Party – Branch of the Institute of Marxism-Leninism of the Central Committee of the CPSU (PA-200) at LNA LVA; lists of internees, wall newspaper “Jaunā Cīņa” (“New Fight”) and other materials from the fund of the International Brigades of the Spanish Republican Army (No. 545) at RGASPI; correspondence and memoirs from the collections of LKM, as well as materials from the personal files in the funds of the Latvian Diplomatic and Consular Representations Abroad (No. 2575) at LNA LVVA, and memoirs from a personal archive of one internee’s relative. Relevant literature, published memoirs and correspondence have been used to illustrate and analyse the data provided by archival materials.

## FIRST INTERNMENT CAMPS

“A new stage in our lives began with a bitter disappointment”, wrote J. P. (probably communist Jānis Palkavnieks) on internment on 25 February 1939 (J. P. 1939, 2). The most convincing numbers given by several Latvian internees in their first letters to “Strādnieku Cīņa” (“Workers’ Fight”), Latvian communistic newspaper printed in Boston, state that there were 43 Latvians in Saint-Cyprien and 16 in Argelès internment camp in February and early March 1939 (J. P. 1939, 2.; J. K. 1939, 2; Benjamiņš 1939, 3). Separated from other men was doctor Leiviks Gutkins who had treated patients from Spanish units in Central Spain, and he was withdrawn much later than others. L. Gutkins left Alicante, Spain on a ship on 27 March 1939, and initially was placed in Morand camp in Boghari (French Department in Algeria) (LNA-LVA, PA-200-6-76, 97-103; LNA-LVVA, 2575-6-1725, 36).

The first internment camps quickly became overpopulated and lacked resources to meet the primary needs of internees (Grynberg 2013, Chapter 2). Even the men who were used to life in the trenches found the conditions to be very harsh. At first, at Saint-Cyprien Latvians dug pits with their

bare hands to hide from the wind. Already feeling humiliated, some faced the brutality of the camp guards and confiscation of personal belongings. Their feet were hurting and covered with blisters after the retreat and the long walk from the border. Short of clothes, hygiene products, sufficient medical care, food, and water they depended upon external help. Shortly after the arrival, four Latvians were taken to a hospital (Benjamiņš 1939, 3). Several Latvians found humour useful to cope with these primitive conditions: “Nevertheless, we are in France, on the shores of the Mediterranean, to relax. All the bourgeois from our homeland can envy us” (Lācis 1957, 133). One of the first improvements was the setup of a footbridge for a lavatory in the sea. The pathway to the lavatory was soon colloquially named “avenue Daladier”, mocking the politics of the French Prime Minister Edouard Daladier (Lācis 1957, 133–134). According to memoirs, the conditions in Argelès internment camp for the smaller group of Latvians were very similar (LNA-LVA, PA-200–6–74, 247; Lācis 1957, 133). One Latvian was taken to a hospital shortly after arrival in the camp (LNA-LVA, PA-200–6–74, 247).

Meanwhile, the French conservative newspapers saw internees as undesirable elements and criminals, others, especially left-wing newspapers, emphasized the unbearable conditions in the camps (Grynberg 2013, Chapter 2). Due to public pressure, living conditions and food supply improved a little. Both Latvian groups in Saint-Cyprien and Argelès received some materials to construct better shelters (Benjamiņš 1939, 3; J. K. 1939, 2; LNA-LVA, PA-200–6–74, 247). In Saint-Cyprien, Latvian group constructed their barrack and furnished it with some tables and chairs made from wood planks, while some members of the group managed to obtain old car seats for sleeping. They connected to electrical grid illegally, thus improving everyday lives even more. Rūdolfs Lācis stated that other internees came to see their barrack as a good example for settling in (Lācis 1957, 134). However, even the improved conditions did not permit to avoid fleas and lice. At first, Voldemārs Kupcis, former pharmacist of the 35<sup>th</sup> Division and chief of pharmaceutical services for the V and XV Corps, helped Latvian group at Saint-Cyprien to fight insects with different powders, but they soon ran out and the group received instructions on washing their clothes properly (LNA-LVVA, 2575–6–1733, 22; Lācis 1957, 135). Insects also accompanied Latvian group in Argelès internment camp during their 24 daily hours of spare time (LNA-LVA, PA-200–6–75, 110).

Even if interned, Latvian groups were not isolated from the outside world. They wrote to families, friends and received food packages,

newspapers, books, some clothes and medicine from different organisations and Latvians in France, Sweden, and the USA (Lācis 1957, 140; LNA-LVA, PA-200-6-74, 247-249; LNA-LVA, PA-200-6-75, 140, 175). Some of them managed to sneak out from the camps to gather more resources for the group (LNA-LVA, PA-200-6-75, 110). Latvians at Saint-Cyprien even had a radio which they hid and listened to in great secrecy (Lācis 1957, 134). In the internment camps, political activities were prohibited (Grynberg 2013, Chapter 2), however, both Latvian groups illegally continued political work. The larger group in Saint-Cyprien together with Lithuanians, Estonians, some Swedes, and Norwegians were organised in a Baltic group. The majority were Latvians, therefore, the group chose as its leader R. Lācis. Augusts Ratnieks was elected as the group's political commissar. Both men had arrived in Spain from the USSR (LNA-LVA, PA-200-6-76, 72-74; Lācis 1957, 134-141).

Latvian men in Saint-Cyprien had created their daily routine that involved waking up at the same time, physical training and learning activities, including language groups and mathematics. One of the group members Benjamins Kūrs listened to the radio and briefed others about international news. If any of the members specialised in economic or historical issues, their knowledge was used by asking to prepare reports on specific questions (Lācis 1957, 134-135). Latvians even split into smaller groups and competed against each other to find out which group knew more about various aspects of Spanish history, geography, culture, economics, and politics. The quiz included 55 questions, such as typical Spanish products, traditional role of the Catholic church, impact of October Revolution on Spain, most important battles of the Spanish Civil War, Reconquista, Workers' Party of Marxist Unification (POUM) "Trotskyists", non-intervention, Popular Front etc. The last question was more personal "What have you gained from participating in battles in Spain?" (RGASPI, 545-4-21, 22-25). The choice of many questions and their wording also gave evidence of the group's communistic beliefs. The complete set of questions were included in the Latvian group's wall newspaper "Jaunā Cīņa". According to R. Lācis, a new issue of the wall newspaper was prepared once in two weeks (Lācis 1957, 135). The second and the third issues have been preserved and archived. They allowed to find out that the group prepared articles, drawings and occupied themselves with such questions as the remembrance of the Paris Commune, German occupation of Czechoslovakia, summary of the 18<sup>th</sup> Congress of the All-Union Communist

Party, the evaluation of activities performed by Latvian group (signed by R. V., most probably – the leader of the group R. Lācis, alias Rūdolfs Vilks), the conditions in the internment camp, as well as derogatory texts on other international developments, politics and events in Latvia (RGASPI, 545-4-21, 1-58).

Everyday life for Latvian group in Argelès internment camp seemed to be less hectic than in Saint-Cyprien. The leader of the group was Arons Lipkins who had joined the Communist Party of Spain. His beliefs in communism were formed much earlier, already before he left Latvia in 1935 to avoid punishment (LNA-LVA, PA-200-6-74, 242; LNA-LVA, PA-200-6-77, 211; LNA-LVVA, 2575-6-1736, 20-21). In a letter to J. Palkavnieks, interned in the camp in Saint-Cyprien, on 28 February 1939, A. Lipkins wrote that the group in Argelès was very united and did not perform any cultural or political activities. A. Lipkins mentioned that specific activities were not needed, as they spent a lot of time in conversations, even if they did not always show “high level of culture” (LNA-LVA, PA-200-6-74, 247-248; Ziemelis 1966, 192). Before leaving Argelès, the members of the Latvian group spent a lot of time reading and they studied materials from the 18<sup>th</sup> Congress of the All-Union Communist Party, as well as history of the Communist Party (LNA-LVA, PA-200-6-74, 242-249).

Mutual relations between the internees might not have been as perfect as later described in heavily redacted, published volume “Latvijas cīnītāji Spānijā: 1936-1939: atmiņas un dokumenti”. R. Lācis in his memoirs stated that some men needed to be convinced of the necessity of strong discipline and activities throughout the day. He described his measures as necessary to keep good morale (Lācis 1957, 135). Latvian communists had a different treatment of those who did not meet their criteria perfectly. Compared to other members of the Latvian group, Voldemārs Kupcis, a son of a professor at the University of Latvia, former student, and a member of student corporation, was an untypical volunteer in the Spanish Civil War (LNA-LVVA, 2575-6-1733, 22, 26). “He lacked stamina”, wrote R. Lācis. However, V. Kupcis left good impression on R. Lācis and A. Ratnieks, who were both concerned about his capabilities to endure the conditions in camp (Ratnieks, 71-71; Lācis 1957, 139-140). R. Lācis noted that he had to pay special attention to V. Kupcis, who tried to keep up with the group (Lācis, 84-85). Furthermore, some collisions arose between most of the Latvian communists and Kārlis Rozenbergs (Kūlijs), also a communist, who was a leading figure – the Secretary of the Central Committee – in

the underground communist organisation Latvian Labour Youth Union in Latvia (Lācis 1970, 5) and was involved in communist slander in Latvia regarding his beliefs and actions. R. Lācis found the accusations untrue and thought that K. Rozenbergs supported “correct communist opinions”, however, K. Rozenbergs was not considered as a member of Latvian communist collective in Saint-Cyprien (Lācis 1957, 141–142).

Willing to return home, many Latvians who had not lost their citizenship, started writing to Latvian legation in Paris to request valid documents for return to Latvia. In their applications, most Latvians avoided to indicate their political beliefs and motivation for participating in the Spanish Civil War, furthermore, the content in some of the letters seemed to be coordinated among the authors (Bikše 2020, 149–166). Latvian authorities investigated each application separately, and looked with suspicion at the internees, therefore only a couple of them were later released from the internment camp in Gurs and could return to Latvia with valid documents, while others received a rejection to issue documents or were deprived of their citizenship due to varied reasons, including the failure to adhere to military conscription (Bikše 2020, 163–166).

The first to separate from Latvian groups and to leave the internment camps were those who had arrived in Spain from the USSR. On 20 March 1939, Latvian group in Saint-Cyprien received the news that some of them could return home. R. Lācis and Aleksandrs Berezins had to stay a few days longer, as they had used their aliases in Spain – R. Vilks and Klaudiuss Čispa (Claudius Chispa) – and needed documents for these names (Lācis 1957, 141–142) Around the end of March and early April 1939, Žanis Artmanis (alias Rūdolfs Tellers), Aleksands Berezins, R. Lācis, A. Ratnieks, Emīls Šteingolds, Voldemārs Vecgailis, Ilja Velkovs embarked upon their route to USSR (Lācis 1957, 141; RGASPI, 545–6–56, 72–73, 95). Both those who were leaving, as well as those who stayed in the internment camps were agitated that the USSR was not providing asylum for Latvians and former members of the International Brigades, and some of them were concerned about the Great Purge in the USSR (Lācis 1957, 141; Pekainis 1965, 47; Volkovs, 34–35; LKM, 8134-nd, 133). According to the data preserved in Russian State Archive of Socio-Political History on 29 March 1939, there were 35 Latvians in Saint-Cyprien and 18 in Argelès (RGASPI, 545–6–59a, 3).

Around the same time when the first men left the Latvian group in internment camps, L. Gutkins started his voyage to Algeria. Morand



internment camp in Boghari had similar issues as other camps, L. Gutkins described unsanitary conditions, lack of sufficient food supply, diseases (LNA-LVA, PA-200-6-76, 100). Even if separated from his nationals, L. Gutkins was not forgotten and received a lot of books and other materials from Latvian emigrants in Paris. Until the beginning of the Second World War, communists in the camp organised different study groups and L. Gutkins taught Russian, however, the conditions worsened after the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, and communists were often denounced to the camp administration (LNA-LVA, PA-200-6-76, 100).

### GURS INTERNMENT CAMP

Internment camp in Gurs was built from 15 March 1939 to 25 April 1939, when most of the works were finished. The camp was meant for 18 000 men and in the short construction period 428 barracks were erected, of which 382 were for internees (Grynberg 2013, Chapter 2). However, even if living conditions were intended to be significantly improved, the camp was constructed as a temporary solution for summer weather, furthermore, it soon became overpopulated (Grynberg 2013, Chapter 2). Latvian groups from Saint-Cyprien and Argeles were transferred to Gurs around the end of April and May 1939, and were placed in compartment (*ilot*) “G” in barracks that were too small for them (LNA-LVA, PA-200-6-74, 116-117, 135, 141; LKM, 8134-nd, 138; LNA-LVVA, 2575-6-1710, 21-22). “Today it is raining, it is swampy and cold here, when there is no sun”, on the conditions of the camp wrote A. Lipkins (LNA-LVA, PA-200-6-74, 249). The group’s members were worried about staying in the camp for winter (LKM, 8134-nd, 145). The food rations remained low and insufficient, the use of water was limited and too scarce to ensure proper hygiene (Grynberg 2013, Chapter 2). “Not even every morning you can wash your face, because there are 20 wooden troughs for 1500 people and they only give water for 2 hours, that is, if everyone wants to wash during this time, it should be done in less than one and a half minute”, anonymously wrote one of the internees to “Strādnieku Cīņa” (X 1939, 3). On 25 June 1939, K. Rozenbergs noted that they had no electricity in the barracks, however, they received punishment and could not get coffee for five days as another group had illegally connected to electricity (LKM, 1945/ 9403 (12)-VII). “During

the entire period I was in Spain, I became sick only once and had a fever for few days. Here, I am sick for the second time”, wrote K. Rozenbergs (LKM, 1945/ 9403 (12)-VII).

Just like other nationalities, Latvian group organised many social activities and participated in such undertakings. On 15 May 1939, Eduards Upesleja described the group’s daily routine: spare time until 9 am (for chess, volleyball etc.), from 9 am to 10 am studies, from 10 am to 12 pm different reports, from 2 pm to 5 pm studies, mostly languages, at 7 pm a summary of day’s events worldwide, as well as information and observations on previous day (LKM 4287/ 10318-VII). Continuing to receive support from Latvians in France, Sweden and USA, the group worked on a wall newspaper and a manuscript that contained information about Latvians in Spain, they also had around 300 books to read and motivation to study the history of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (LKM, 4287/ 10318-VII; LNA-LVA, PA-200–6–74, 117). Many activities in the camp became transnational – K. Rozenbergs described a chess tournament in which 12 nationalities participated. Latvian group won the second place (LKM, 8134-nd, 146). The group’s celebration of 1 May 1939 gathered Lithuanians, Estonians, and Portuguese. The main event included an overview of the international situation, speeches by the members of the Baltic groups, and different Latvian, Lithuanian, Estonian, Russian, Spanish, Portuguese songs, and the Internationale (LKM, 8134-nd, 136–139). Very typical Latvian festival – Midsummer solstice celebrations or *Jāņi* brought together not only Latvians but also Paraguayans, Uruguayans and other South Americans who lived in the same barracks. Each of the festival participants had a bottle of beer and could enjoy the typical rainy day of *Jāņi* together (LKM, 8134-nd, 143).

If the activities in the camp seemed to portray an idyllic community, in reality Latvian group was not completely united. During summer 1939 V. Kupcis and Kārlis Embriķis both separated from the Latvian group in Gurs and moved to compartment “F”. In letters to Latvian legation in Paris both men highlighted the communistic character of Latvian group in Gurs compartment “G” (Bikše 2020, 156–166).

After the beginning of the Second World War, political and cultural activities of the group ceased. One of the leading figures of Latvian group, A. Lipkins mostly blamed group’s unconditional submission to the wishes of Communist Party leadership and the inability to find new work methods. The group avoided organising meetings and destroyed literature on

politics. However, after the proposal of Avins Zundulis in January 1940 Latvian communists resumed some activities regarding economics and culture (LNA-LVA, PA-200-6-74, 243-244).

Even before the beginning of the Second World War the internees were urged to enlist in the French Foreign Legion. For a long time, the group resisted, continued their mostly unsuccessful pleading with Latvian authorities and public figures, and dreamed about opportunities to travel to Mexico, Sweden, even Australia or New Zealand (LNA-LVA, PA-200-6-74, 117; LKM, 8134-nd, 145; LKM, 4287/ 10318-VII; Bikše 2020, 163-166). Only a handful of Latvian internees managed to leave the camp legally with valid documents permitting them to travel or live abroad (LNA-LVA, PA-200-6-75, 187). When the Second World War started, food supply in the camp deteriorated even further, and the internees felt an increased pressure to enlist in the French Foreign Legion. Finally, around May 1940, Jānis Trokša and Vladislavs Dukaļskis volunteered and left the internment camp (LNA-LVA, PA-200-6-75, 111). Others, especially in early 1940, felt the need to escape. First ones to try escape routes were the former sailor Antons Pekainis and Rudins Šmuels, who knew French. Their group members helped them and hoped that they could be especially useful in aiding others to flee. However, A. Pekainis and R. Šmuels were caught on the road and, after receiving punishment in a prison, were transferred back to the internment camp (Pekainis 1965, 45-51). Meanwhile, the rest of Latvian group members planned and gathered resources for other breakouts. After an unsuccessful and foolish capture of a larger group of runaways, it was decided to focus on individual escapes (LNA-LVA, PA-200-6-75, 143-145). Successful in escaping were Leons Čerņins, Ruvins Fels, Leons Kleinmanis, Benjamins Kūrs, J. Palkavnieks, Rūdolfs Šmits, Aleksandrs Timme, Jānis Cinis and some others (LNA-LVA, PA-200-6-75, 7, 112). Of course, not everyone was lucky, Fricis Pūce got caught twice (LNA-LVA, PA-200-6-74, 117). In their memoirs, the Latvian group members stated that they were moved to solitary confinement several times due to their attempts to escape and the high percentage of Latvian escapees<sup>2</sup> (LNA-LVA, PA-200-6-75, 143-145; Lācis 1957, 65).

---

<sup>2</sup> Part of the escapees also later became citizens of the USSR.

## INTERNMENT CAMPS AFTER GERMAN INVASION IN FRANCE

After the beginning of the Battle of France, the remaining Latvian internees hoped that their fate would not be decided by Nazi Germany (Pekainis 1965, 51). In spring and early June of 1940, Latvian group was split. Georgs Broziņš, Maksis Hurēvičs, A. Lipkins, Juris Klimkāns and a couple of other active communists were transferred to Le Vernet internment camp (LNA-LVA, PA-200-6-74, 85, 92, 112, 117, 181) The group members in Le Vernet used their spare time to study languages, mathematics and read international news, however, their activities were limited due to lack of resources (LNA-LVA, PA-200-6-74, 85, 112). The rest of the group was placed in internment camp in Argelès, where they continued Russian studies and learned the USSR history (LNA-LVA, PA-200-6-74, 117). “Here real famine and suffering began”, wrote Žanis Folmanis (Grīva) on his experience in Argelès (Lācis 1957, 66). The group had to endure violence of the camp guards and had very scarce resources, which they tried to supplement with local donations.

In October 1940, after Soviet request, most of Latvians were transferred to a camp in Carpiagne and later – to Les Milles transfer camp (LNA-LVA, PA-200-6-74, 85, 98, 117, 245). In Les Milles, the everyday-life conditions had not improved. Eager to be Soviet citizens, Latvian group intensively studied USSR Constitution and history of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (LNA-LVA, PA-200-6-74, 112, 118). If the majority of Latvians were freed from the camps after more than two years of internment, Semjons Levinsons, who did not get into the first group of people leaving for USSR and was transferred to Algeria, and L. Gutkins, who had already been in Algeria since 1939, continued enduring harsh conditions and were released from internment camps only in 1943 following the requests by Soviet representative (LNA-LVA, PA-200-6-76, 96, 102).

## CONCLUSIONS

Protracted hours on the Mediterranean beaches in the first internment camps for Latvians, former participants of the Spanish Civil War, were not a long-awaited vacation but a new endurance test that for many of the internees continued for two years. In Saint-Cyprien and Argelès, improvements in Latvian groups' living conditions were mostly achieved

by receiving donations from Latvian emigrants and different organisations. Gurs internment camp was intended as a temporary and improved shelter, however, good intentions did not match the amount of real-life necessities. After the beginning of the Second World War, the living conditions only worsened.

For many Latvians, life in camps gave time for multitude of things, including transnational experiences, language studies, reading, reflecting on their experience in Spain, as well as discussions on various subjects. In Saint-Cyprien, Latvians from USSR had a great influence over the whole group. As the group's leader, R. Lācis played an important role both in upholding the discipline among Latvian group and promoting communism. In comparison, the smaller Latvian group in Argelès internment camp was not too eager to organise social activities or to create or read communist propaganda. This first experience in Saint-Cyprien gave an example and set the tone for later activities in the particularly intense period in Gurs during summer 1939, that was stopped by the beginning of the Second World War, and for separate activities in other camps later on.

The internment camps were not only confined spaces with harsh living conditions for the “undesired” men, but also places where violence was a daily companion. The internees were abused by the guards, and everyday life itself could be hard amongst the interned men. The article provided examples to show that not every member was easily manipulated and satisfied with the communistic character of Latvian group, and that some pressure might have been applied, especially by Latvians from the USSR, for everyone to comply with communist leadership and their plans. Disappointed in Western politics and having received a refusal of Latvian authorities to issue valid documents for return, many of the internees, who had not left the camps legally and did not escape during 1940, in 1941 and a couple – in 1943 saw the USSR as their saviour from internment and abandonment, finding it insignificant that in 1939 the doors of the USSR were closed even for the most ardent foreign communists from the former International Brigades.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The article was prepared within the framework of the project No. VPP-IZM-2018/1-0018 “Interaction between the individual, the society and

the state in process of the history of Latvia: Conflicting values and formation of shared values during historical turning points”.

#### ABBREVIATIONS

- LKK – Latvian War Museum (*Latvijas Kara muzejs*)  
 Latvian SSR – Latvian Soviet Socialist Republic  
 LNA-LVA – Latvian National Archive, State Archives of Latvia (*Latvijas Nacionālais arhīvs, Latvijas Valsts arhīvs*)  
 LNA-LVVA – Latvian National Archive, Latvian State Historical Archives (*Latvijas Nacionālais arhīvs, Latvijas Valsts vēstures arhīvs*)  
 RGASPI – Russian State Archive of Socio-Political History (*Rossijskij gosudarstvennyj arhiv social'no-politicheskoj istorii*)  
 USA – United States of America  
 USSR – Union of Soviet Socialist Republics

#### SOURCES

- Antons Pekainis (1965). Cīņas spars nekad neapsīka. Personal archive of Rita Ruduša.  
 Arons Lipkins (1939). Lūgums. LNA-LVVA, 2575–6–1736, 20.–21. lp.  
 Augusts Ratnieks. Sapieru dienestā Spānijā. Personal archive of Rita Ruduša.  
 Benjamiņš. Latvju dēli Francijā. *Strādnieku Cīņa*, 15.04.1939., 3. lpp.  
 Etat des camps au 29 Mars 1939. RGASPI, 545–6–59a, p. 3.  
 Jaunā Cīņa Nr. 2, Nr. 3 (1939). RGASPI, 545–4–21.  
 Jānis Beniķis (1939). Lūgums. LNA-LVVA, 2575–6–1710, 21.–22. lp.  
 Jānis Volkovs. Brīvprātīhie bruņutanku karaspēka daļās Spānijā. Personal archive of Rita Ruduša.  
 J. K. Latvju dēli Francijā. *Strādnieku Cīņa*, 27.05.1939., 2. lpp.  
 J. P. Latvju dēli Francijā. *Strādnieku Cīņa*, 01.04.1939., 2. lpp.  
 Kārļa Rozenberga vēstule Olgai no Francijas. 1939. gada 25. jūnijs. LKM, 1945/ 9403 (12)-VII.  
 Latvijas cīnītāji Spānijā 1936–1939, salikuma eksemplārs (1966). LNA-LVA, PA-200–6–74.  
 Latvijas cīnītāji Spānijā 1936–1939, I turpinājums (1966). LNA-LVA, PA-200–6–75.  
 Latvijas cīnītāji Spānijā 1936–1939, II turpinājums (1966). LNA-LVA, PA-200–6–76.  
 Latvijas cīnītāji Spānijā 1936–1939, III turpinājums (1966). LNA-LVA, PA-200–6–77.  
 Leiviks Gutkins (1939). Lettre. LNA-LVVA, 2575–6–1725, 36. lp.  
 Lettons. RGASPI, 545–6–56, P. 95.  
 Liste des camarades partis definitivement (1939). RGASPI, 545–6–56, P. 72–73.  
 Partijas vēstures sektora sēdes protokols (1965). LNA-LVA, PA-200–7–38, 15.–18. lp.

- Rūdolfis Lācis (1970). Kārlis Rozenbergs-Kūlijs: 1911–1941: dzīve un darbs. Rīga: Liesma, 1970.
- Rūdolfis Lācis (sast.) (1957). *Viva republica!* Rīga: LVI.
- Rūdolfa Lāča atmiņu manuskripts par Kārli Rozenbergu. 1969. gads. LKM 8134-nd.
- Sigurds Ziemelis (atb. red.) (1966). *Latvijas cīnītāji Spānijā: 1936–1939: atmiņas un dokumenti*. Rīga: Liesma.
- Spānijas cīņu dalībnieka E. Upeslejas vēstule. 1939. gads. LKM 4287/ 10318-VII.
- Voldemārs Kupcis (1939). Aptaujas liste. LNA-LVVA, 2575–6–1733, 22. lp.
- Voldemārs Kupcis (1939). Lūgums. LNA-LVVA, 2575–6–1733, 26. lp.
- X. Latvju dēli Francijā. *Strādnieku Cīņa*, 17.06.1939., 3. lpp.

## SECONDARY SOURCES / LITERATURE

- Bikše, Ginta Ieva (2020). Latvijas brīvprātīgie Spānijas pilsoņu karā (1936.–1939. g.): personu lietu dokumenti Latvijas Valsts vēstures arhīva Latvijas diplomātisko un konsulāro pārstāvniecību ārzemēs fondā. No: Valda Pētersone (galv. red.) *Dokumentārā mantojuma bagātības Latvijas arhīvos*. Rīga: Latvijas Nacionālais arhīvs, 149.–171. lpp.
- Bikše, Ginta Ieva (2021). Neiejaukšanās politika starpkaru krīzes situācijā. Spānijas pilsoņu karš un Latvija. No: Andris Sprūds, Valters Ščerbinskis, Mārtiņš Vargulis (zin. red.). *Latvijas ārlietu simtgade: daudzpusējā diplomātija un starptautiskās organizācijas*. Rīga: Latvijas Ārpolitikas Institūts, 75.–97. lpp.
- Butulis, Ilgvars, Feldmanis, Inesis, Jēkabsons, Ēriks, Lipša, Ineta, Stranga, Aivars, Taurēns, Jānis, Zunda, Antonijs (2017). *15. maija Latvija*. Rīga: Latvijas Mediji.
- Casanova, Julián (2010). *The Spanish Republic and Civil War*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Eglīte, Sindija, Zālite, Indulis (2002). 1941. gada 14. jūnija deportācijas struktūranalīze. No: Māra Brencē, Dzintars Ērglis, (sast.) *1941. gada 14. jūnija deportācija – noziegums pret cilvēci: starptautiskās konferences materiāli, Latvijas Vēsturnieku komisijas raksti, 6. sēj.* Rīga, 2001, 40.–50. lpp.
- Gildea, Robert, Tames, Ismee (eds.) (2020). *Fighters across frontiers: Transnational resistance in Europe, 1936–48*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2020.
- Grynberg, Anne (2013). *Les camps de la honte: Les internés juifs des camps français (1939–1944)* [Online]. Paris: La Découverte. Available from: <https://books.google.lv/books?id=ofQSZ3FJp7AC&hl=lv>
- Peschanski, Denis (2000). *Les camps français d'internement (1938–1946) – Doctorat d'Etat. Histoire*. Paris: Université Panthéon-Sorbonne.
- Ščerbinskis, Valters, Jēkabsons, Ēriks (sast.) (2012). *Apvērsums: 1934. gada 15. maija notikumi avotos un pētījumos*. Rīga: Latvijas Nacionālais arhīvs.
- Stranga, Aivars (2013). K. Ulmaņa autoritārais režīms (1934–1940): politika, ideoloģija, saimniecība. No: Jānis Stradiņš (galv. red.). *Latvieši un Latvija: akadēmiskie raksti. Valstiskums Latvijā un Latvijas valsts – izcīnītā un zaudētā. II sējums*. Rīga: Latvijas Zinātņu akadēmija, 341.–365. lpp.

## LATVIJAS IZCELSMES SPĀNIJAS PILSOŅU KARA DALĪBNIEKI INTERNĒTO NOMETNĒS FRANCIJĀ (1939–1941)

*Ginta Ieva Bikše*

Mg. hist., Dr. hist. grāda pretendente, Latvijas Universitātes Vēstures un filozofijas fakultāte; zinātniskā asistente, Latvijas Universitātes Latvijas vēstures institūts

1939. gada sākumā, atkāpjoties no Katalonijas, vairāk nekā 50 ar Latviju saistītas personas, bijušie Spānijas pilsoņu kara dalībnieki, šķērsoja Spānijas un Francijas robežu, pēc tam nonākot internēto nometnēs Francijā. Raksta mērķis ir sniegt pārskatu un analizēt Latvijas izcelsmes bijušo Spānijas pilsoņu kara dalībnieku – vīriešu – pieredzi internēto nometnēs. Rakstā pievērsta uzmanība internēto sociālajām aktivitātēm un savstarpējām attiecībām, sadzīves apstākļiem un to atšķirībām Sensiprijēnas, Aržalē, Girsas, Vernē u. c. nometnēs, ņemot vērā Otrā pasaules kara sākumu un Viši režīma izveidi. Tāpat atzīmēta Latvijas varas iestāžu attieksme pret internētajiem Latvijas pilsoņiem, kā arī aplūkotas Latvijas izcelsmes bijušo Spānijas pilsoņu kara dalībnieku iespējas izkļūt no internēto nometnēm Francijā.

*Atslēgas vārdi:* Spānijas pilsoņu karš, internēto nometnes Francijā, komunisms, Latvijas izcelsmes internētie Francijā.

### Kopsavilkums

Ar Latviju saistītas personas, kas 1939. gada sākumā nonāca internēto nometnēs Francijā, lielākoties bija pārtraukušas aktīvi piedalīties Spānijas pilsoņu karā pēc Huana Negrīna 1938. gada (*Juan Negrín*) paziņojuma par ārzemnieku atsaukšanu. Tāpat kā vairāku citu autoritāru un totalitāru valstu pilsoņi, kuri nevarēja atgriezties dzimtenē, vēl 1939. gada sākumā daudzi Latvijas izcelsmes bijušie Spānijas pilsoņu kara dalībnieki uzturējās Katalonijā, kuru strauji ieņēma frankisti. Pievienojoties pēdējām atkāpšanās kaujām un 1939. gada februāra sākumā dodoties Francijas virzienā, pēc robežas šķērsošanas kopumā nedaudz vairāk nekā 50 ar Latviju saistītu personu tika ievietotas divās internēto nometnēs – Sensiprijēnas (*Saint-Cyprien*) un Aržalē (*Argelès-sur-Mer*) – antisanitāros un necilvēcīgos apstākļos bez pienācīgas medicīniskās aprūpes un pajumtes, pārtikas vai dzeramā ūdens. Centrālo Spāniju atstājot vien 1939. gada marta beigās, atsevišķā nometnē Alžīrijā nonāca Leiviks Gutkins. Liela daļa internēto Latvijas izcelsmes bijušo Spānijas pilsoņu kara dalībnieku bija saistīti ar komunistiskajām organizācijām. Rakstā apzināti lielākoties izmantots jēdziens “Latvian”, kas saskaņā ar angļu valodas skaidrojošo vārdnīcu nozīmē personu, kas nākusi no Latvijas, pieder vai ir saistīta ar Latviju, tās valodu vai cilvēkiem,<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Cambridge Dictionary, “Latvians”: <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/latvian>



raksta ierobežotā apjoma dēļ specifiski neizdalot sarežģīto katras internētās personas pilsonības jautājumu un ņemot vērā šo personu kopējo izjusto saikni ar Latviju. Tajā pašā laikā neignorējot un uzsverot PSRS īstenotās politikas lomu, norādīti Latvijas izcelsmes internētie no PSRS, kas cieši saistāmi ar šīs valsts īstenoto politiku. Kopumā Latvijas izcelsmes internēto grupa plašākā Latvijas vēstures kontekstā lielākoties ir interesanta tās vairākumā Latvijas neatkarībai naidīgo uzskatu dēļ, kā arī latviešu no PSRS lomā šīs grupas komunistisko uzskatu stiprināšanā. Vēlāk daļa bijušo internēto Spānijas pilsoņu kara dalībnieku entuziastiski atbalstīja padomju okupācijas varu – šo personu vidū var minēt, piemēram, agrākos Latvijas Republikas pilsoņus – rakstnieku Žani Folmani (Grīvu) un no nometnes izbēgušo Jāni Cini, vēlāko Latvijas Padomju Sociālistiskās Republikas iekšlietu tautas komisāra vietnieku, kurš ar savu parakstu apstiprināja vairākus tūkstošus lēmumu par Latvijas iedzīvotāju deportācijām (Zālīte, Eglīte 2002, 41).

Kā galvenos avotus izmantojot Latvijas Nacionālā arhīva, Latvijas Vēstures arhīva Latvijas Komunistiskās partijas Centrālās Komitejas Sociālpolitisko pētījumu institūta – PSKP CK Marksisma-ļeņinisma institūta filiāles (PA-200) fondā saglabāto “Latvijas cīnītāji Spānijā: 1936–1939: atmiņas un dokumenti” manuskriptu, internēto sarakstus, sienas avīzi “Jaunā Cīņa” un citus materiālus no Krievijas Valsts sociālpolitiskās vēstures arhīva Spānijas republikāniskās armijas Internacionālo brigāžu (545) fonda, Latvijas Kara muzeja kolekciju vēstules un atmiņas, personu lietu dokumentus no Latvijas Nacionālā arhīva Latvijas Valsts vēstures arhīva Latvijas diplomātisko un konsulāro pārstāvniecību ārzemēs (2575) fonda, kā arī atmiņas, kas saglabātas internētā radnieka personīgajā arhīvā, publicētās atmiņas un saraksti, rakstā sniegts ieskats un analizēta ar Latvijai saistītu vīriešu pieredze internēto nometnēs. Padziļināta uzmanība pievērsta šo internēto sabiedriskajām aktivitātēm un savstarpējām attiecībām, uzturēšanās ilgumam, Latvijas varas iestāžu attieksmei pret internētajiem Latvijas pilsoņiem, sadzīves apstākļiem un to atšķirībām dažādās nometnēs un laika posmos. Situācijas padziļinātākai raksturošanai izmantota saistoša zinātniskā literatūra. Raksta mērķis nav analizēt Latvijas izcelsmes personu dalību Spānijas pilsoņu karā, tāpēc šis jautājums tiešā veidā nav aplūkots detalizēti. Tāpat rakstā nav apskatīta arī pavisam niecīga skaita Latvijas izcelsmes sieviešu internēšana, kas saistāma ar daudz vieglākiem apstākļiem.

Rakstā secināts, ka dzīve internēto nometnēs pārbaudīja ar Latviju saistīto personu fizisko un morālo izturību. Sensipriņēnas un Aržalē nometnēs sadzīves apstākļus lielākoties izdevās uzlabot, pateicoties Latvijas emigrantu un ārvalstu sabiedrisko organizāciju atbalstam. Savukārt Girsas nometne nesasniedza plānoto uzlabojumu līmeni. Pēc Otrā pasaules kara sākuma situācija nometnēs tikai pasliktinājās. Kopumā daudziem internētajiem nometnes sniedza laiku un iespēju apmainīties ar pieredzi transnacionālā vidē, apgūt valodas, lasīt,

pārdomāt piedzīvoto Spānijā, kā arī diskutēt par dažādām tēmām. Sensiprijēnas nometnē latvieši no PSRS ievērojami ietekmēja grupas noskaņojumu un ikdienas aktivitātes. Nozīmīga loma bija Rūdolfam Lācim kā Baltiešu grupas vadītājam, kurš nodrošināja stingru disciplīnu un veicināja padziļinātu zināšanu apgūšanu, tai skaitā par komunismu. Arī pēc latviešu no PSRS došanās prom nometnē piedzīvotais noskaņojums un paveiktais palikušajiem komunistiem kalpoja kā praksē izmantojams rīcības modelis. Visaktīvāk Latvijas izcelsmes internētie dažādās sabiedriskās aktivitātēs iesaistījās Girsas nometnē, bet vēlāk, apstākļu spiesti, citās nometnēs īstenoja vien atsevišķus pasākumus. Jāņem vērā, ka pieredze internēto nometnē bija saistīta ar vardarbību, kuru īstenoja gan sargi, gan arī paši internētie savā starpā. Rakstā izmantotie piemēri norāda, ka atsevišķos gadījumos komunistiski noskaņotie Latvijas izcelsmes internētie, it īpaši latvieši no PSRS, ietekmēja grupas sastāva noskaņojumu vai rīcību, kā arī ne visi bija viegli manipulējami un apmierināti ar šādu ikdienu. Tās ar Latviju saistītās personas, kas no internēto nometnēm neizkļuva ar derīgiem dokumentiem vai neizbēga, it īpaši 1940. gada pirmajā pusē, lielākoties pēc vairāk nekā diviem gadiem nometnēs pavadītā laika – 1941. gada martā sagaidīja iespēju doties uz PSRS, novērtējot kā nesvarīgu neapmierinātību un neizpratni, ka PSRS 1939. gadā neuzņēma bijušos Internacionālo brigāžu cīnītājus, tai skaitā pārliecinātus komunistus.

## PATEICĪBA

Raksts sagatavots LU LVI īstenotā VPP projektā Nr. VPP-IZM-2018/1-0018 “Indivīda, sabiedrības un valsts mijiedarbība kopējā Latvijas vēstures procesā: vērtību konflikti un kopīgu vērtību veidošanās vēsturiskos lūzuma punktos”.

Saņemts / Submitted 18.01.2022.

© 2022 Ginta Ieva Bikše. Latvijas Universitāte

Raksts publicēts brīvpieejā saskaņā ar Creative Commons Attiecinājuma-Nekomerciāls 4.0 Starptautisko licenci (CC BY-NC 4.0).

This is an open access article licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC BY-NC 4.0)

(<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>).