

Lithuania's Demarcation of Information from Poland's Solidarity Movement in 1980–1981

Andrius Vaišnys

Vilnius University

andrius.vaisnys@kf.vu.lt

ORCID: 0000-0002-7079-3611

ABSTRACT

The aim of the article: Despite the fact that everything we know in Polish history about the emergence of *Solidarity* [Polish: *Solidarność*], Polish trade unions, in 1980-1981, and the conflict with the communist totalitarian regime is described in sources as ‘the Polish Crisis’, the question remains open about the contemporaneous deepening communication crisis of the communist government in Lithuania, whose history had long – until the middle of the 20th century – been very closely linked to the development of Poland. From 1951 to 1989, Lithuania was separated from Poland by a double barbed-wire Soviet border barrier without any border crossing points. Nevertheless, the author proposes delving into what type of information control measures the Soviet regime used in influencing the Lithuanian people by undermining their interest in the workers’ strikes and the expanding trade union movement in Poland 40 years ago, trying to set Lithuanians against Polish society, and also how the media in the West helped renew the dialogue between Lithuanian and Polish diaspora organisations. **Research methods:** The author performed a content analysis of KGB documents in the Lithuanian Special Archives and examined the content of the Lithuanian SSR mass media and the mass media of the Lithuanian diaspora in the United States. **Results and conclusions:** The Soviet concept of security that was implemented by the repressive structure of the KGB was largely associated with the restriction of information, censorship and self-censorship of the population. However, it was also associated with the recruitment of Lithuanian citizens into ongoing cooperation with the secret service to collect data about Polish people who were ‘disloyal’ to the regime and transfer information to the security service of communist Poland, so the content of these reports must be disclosed. **Cognitive value:** Thus, the article provides the broader context, in which the content of the propaganda press is only one element of the system that controlled the public space.

KEYWORDS

communication crisis, KGB, Lithuania, Lithuanian press, media, Poland, Solidarity (*Solidarność*), Tomas Venclova

One day in the autumn of 1980, the principal of a Vilnius school enters a classroom of seniors, and instead of conducting a chemistry lesson, he starts telling the 35 pupils about the strikes in Poland. He must explain how the public dissatisfaction with economic and political life in the neighbouring country of Poland, which belongs to the Communist Bloc, should be assessed¹. The principal says what he was instructed to say: trying to make the pupils understand that the West is fuelling that discontent, he recommends that they assess the events 'soberly'. However, when the pupils ask him why the workers are unhappy, he says:

"Well, you know, in Poland even the workers want to be gentlemen. And gentlemen, as you know from history, aren't used to working. The Poles, as we recall, are such a people."

This is how one of the many lessons in propaganda education that were being conducted in all of the schools at the time looked (Lithuanian Special Archives (LSA), archive fund (f.) 1771, inventory (inv.) 267, case (c.) 29, p. 4). It is also a significant contextual circumstance when analysing the content of the Soviet mass media aimed at the population of Lithuania. It is unforgettable as a verbal testimony that we will not find such abstract and open denigration of another nation among the texts of the propaganda mass media of the Lithuanian SSR. The propaganda system established in the Central Committee of the Communist Party included not only the work of permanent lecturer-propagandists, but also the regular informing of the heads of bodies and institutions on the most important political issues. 'The Socialist Commonwealth – a Powerful Fortress of Peace' – this was approved in August 1980 to be added to the other two topics ('Disarmament – a Time Requirement' and 'The Destructive Actions of Beijing's Leaders') that lecturers were meant to speak on in terms of international issues in Lithuania.

Like in the other Baltic countries controlled by Moscow, the repressive apparatus could suppress any physical resistance or public demonstration in Lithuania from the early 1960s. When the partisan movement ('war after war'; Mekaite, 2004) was defeated, the regime persecuted the ever-emerging dissident groups, underground publishers and priests who criticised restrictions on freedom of thought. The largest and only demonstration before the Perestroika period (1985–1990) took place in 1972 in Kaunas, where people expressed solidarity with the suffering of a young man who had decided to self-immolate in public.

In the post-Stalin era, the public space narrowed down to the tools of the media system (or more precisely – the system of propaganda and agitation) of the Communist Party, also did not have any legal form of the religious press – unlike in the Polish People's Republic (PRL). The Church could not issue any publications for lay people, but the Catholic Committee for the Defence of the Rights of Believers set up by a few priests (1978) operated informally, and the Chronicle of the Catholic Church in Lithuania, which covered cases of restriction of freedom of conscience, was put together underground and smuggled to the West for distribution (starting in 1972).

The demarcation between Lithuania and Poland was strict – the USSR border separating the two nations had no place or way of direct contact. Despite the so-called 'repatriation campaigns'

¹ On 1 July 1980, the communist government of Poland raised food prices, setting off workers' strikes. The Olympic Games started in Moscow on 19 July 1980.

carried out during the Stalin era after World War II, when approximately 150,000 residents of Polish descent and former citizens of the Republic of Poland left the territory of Lithuania – especially from the Vilnius region – in 1944-1947, the Polish community remained relatively large (approximately 240,000) and was interested in Polish life (Srebrakowski, 2001). However, a resident of the Lithuanian SSR who was a citizen of the USSR could only expect to receive a permit to visit the Polish People's Republic after obtaining an invitation from a Polish citizen and registering with the Office of Visas and Registration of the USSR Ministry of Internal Affairs. Accordingly, residents were entitled to invite a citizen of communist Poland to visit, but they also had to obtain a permit from the said office to host the guest. The Leningrad-Berlin train was the only international connection and was used by many of the residents who received permits for short trips, and knew that at the Byelorussian SSR Grodno USSR border crossing, they would undergo a thorough, usually degrading, baggage and passenger screening before the train entered Poland.

The only public communication opportunity to hear Polish news live were broadcasts of Polskie Radio Programme I, which reached listeners in Vilnius, and part of the communist Polish press (from a list approved by Soyuzpechat²), which reached readers at newsstands in Vilnius and some other cities in the Lithuanian SSR. This news from a neighbouring communist country had more diverse content, especially on cultural issues, so it was of interest to readers who spoke or were trying to learn Polish so that they could legally obtain information of a slightly freer nature within the Communist Bloc; and with a part of Lithuanian – especially intellectual – society, this was a major factor of interest in the Polish press until the summer of 1980. For example, Vytautas Landsbergis, a researcher of the works of the artist and composer Mikalojus Konstantinas Čiurlionis, admits that he used to try to acquire as much diverse press as possible from Poland, since it had broader content on cultural issues than Soviet publications did.³ Therefore, the information field and control of the public space in Lithuania should be viewed a bit differently: the events in Poland were of interest not only to people of Polish descent, but also to people for whom the events bore testimony to dissatisfaction with the regime and who wanted to legally obtain more diverse news.

We will discuss below how the communication crisis was deepened and objective information was limited about what was happening in Poland.

About Control and Propaganda in 1980: Termination of the Distribution of Press from Communist Poland in the USSR

The report of the Lithuanian SSR division of the KGB⁴ for the headquarters in Moscow and other correspondence show how regular surveillance of the Lithuanian population was conducted. The KGB would inform the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Lithuania,⁵ i.e., the top puppet leadership:

“Reports were also sent to party bodies about the public reaction to the events in Poland, about the behaviour of foreigners in the republic and Soviet citizens travelling abroad, about nationalist

² A Soviet state agency and a network of enterprises for the distribution of periodicals.

³ Author's conversation with Vytautas Landsbergis, 2020.

⁴ KGB, Russian: КГБ – Комитет государственной безопасности (Committee for State Security). The agency operated within the territory of Lithuania as a branch of the Soviet KGB and kept paperwork in Russian and Lithuanian.

⁵ The Communist Party of Lithuania was a structural unit of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU).

and clerical court proceedings, and about »personnel littering« at institutions and organisations, misconduct or compromising material about individual members of the communist party” (Letter from the LSSR party committee and collegium, p. 42; translated from Russian).

The changes in Poland in the summer of 1980, when the top party leadership⁶ decided to raise meat prices on 1 July, prompting factory strikes, as a result, affected the options the Lithuanian population had for alternative sources of information. First of all, the events in Poland led to the special services of the USSR renewing the suppression of Western radio station broadcasts, which the Lithuanian population had a wide variety of – the Voice of America, Radio Free Europe and Radio Vatican (broadcast not only in Lithuanian, but also in Russian and Polish). Russian news was broadcast by Deutsche Welle as well as Radio Sweden from Stockholm, so the latest news about the strikes in Poland (“the Polish Crisis”⁷) also reached the population over those airwaves.

The emergence of Solidarity in the Polish People’s Republic coincided with the beginning of the Moscow Olympic Games (19 July-3 August 1980), so the main communist propaganda was aimed at presenting this international event, despite the fact that it had been boycotted by many Western countries. Thus, an examination of Soviet mass media alone could give the impression that the topic of the strikes and the emergence of Solidarity did not reach the population until the autumn of 1980. However, let us bear in mind that up until November 1980, Lithuania still had access to Polish cultural and entertainment mass media with content that made it possible to learn about the changes.

The main communist daily newspapers that were published in Lithuania were the Lithuanian-language *Tiesa* (‘The Truth’), the Russian-language *Советская Литва* (‘Soviet Lithuania’, 1944-1990), and the Polish-language *Czerwony Sztandar* (‘The Red Banner’, 1953-1990); there was also *Komjaunimo tiesa* (‘The Truth of the Communist Youth’), a daily newspaper for young people, and *Vakarinės naujienos* (‘The Evening News’), an evening daily in Vilnius. Both in these newspapers and in the other press, the events in Poland were initially – until the start of the Olympic Games – hushed up; later, rather than explaining their essence, there were attempts to focus the reader’s attention on the ‘instigative activities’ of Western politicians and mass media outlets. The facts were covered up by the lexicon of communist propaganda about an attempt to ‘use the *stoppages at work* for hostile political purposes’, thus replacing the concept of the strike with another word for several weeks, retelling *Trybuna Ludu*, the main Polish communist daily newspaper. However, to understand the circumstances, let us turn to the first publications that testify to how material events were ignored.

On 6 July, *Tiesa* published texts in Lithuania that had been prepared by *Gazeta Współczesna*, a communist daily newspaper in the Białystok Voivodeship, about the progress of north-eastern Poland ‘in the 36 years that have passed since 22 July 1944, when the Polish Committee of National Liberation proclaimed its manifesto’ (“Dideli ir gražūs pasikeitimai” [“Big and beautiful changes”] – *Tiesa*, 1980, July 6). According to the editor-in-chief of *Gazeta Współczesna*, ‘Now people live here in affluence, most of them educated’ (Socha, “Norime jums papasakoti” [“We want to tell you”] – *Tiesa*, 1980, July 6). The ‘Socialist Countries’ section reports news one day that the Silesian University of Technology was celebrating its 35th anniversary (*Tiesa*, 1980, August 3), and then that ‘the Warsaw television factory has produced over 100,000 Jupiter colour televisions’ (*Tiesa*, 1980, August 8), and that ‘more than 2.6 million tourists travelled to the socialist commonwealth countries in the first half of this year’ (*Tiesa*, 1980, August 19).

⁶ Politburo of the Polish United Workers’ Party (PZPR).

⁷ Wilson Center. Digital Archive: International History Declassified, n.d., “1980-81 Polish Crisis”. Retrieved from <https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/collection/11/1980-81-polish-crisis>

A report from Warsaw, citing the 4 July issue of *Trybuna Ludu*, the newspaper of the Polish United Workers' Party (PZPR), as its source, said that 'the *traditional meetings* in Crimea' between General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union L. Brezhnev and First Secretary of the PZPR Edward Gierek⁸ 'are very important events for our parties, states and nations'. At the new meeting, these statesmen purportedly 'discussed various issues of mutual cooperation and international policy' ('[Ivairiapusiško bendradarbiavimo keliu] ["Through multifaceted cooperation"] – *Tiesa*, 1980, August 5). In Vilnius, *Czerwony Sztandar* published this report on the front page with a photograph of both of the leaders. Meanwhile, on 11 July, *Vakarinės naujienos* reported the first news from Poland that 'heavy rains have caused severe flooding in many parts of Poland,' and that 'such heavy rainfall has not been seen here for the last 250 years' ('Liūtys. Varšuva' ["Heavy rains. Warsaw"] – *Vakarinės naujienos*, 1980, July 11).

21 August is the first publication of Gierek's speech, where TASS, the central Soviet information agency, notified ELTA, the Lithuanian news agency, that the Polish Press Agency [Polish: Polska Agencja Prasowa] (PAP) had circulated the speech of the first secretary of the Central Committee of the PZPR: 'E. Gierek stated that the Central Committee of the PZPR is concerned about the recent events in the country *related to stoppages at work at some enterprises* which are disrupting the normal rhythm of life.' (*Tiesa*, 1980, August 21). The evasion of the truth is evident, under the cover of brief reports from the Polish Communist Press and the Soviet agency (*Tiesa*, 1980, August 26).⁹

The concept of 'strike' only appeared in the Lithuanian press for the first time on 3 September.¹⁰ Even though the report from that day stated that 'a number of articles had been published in the Polish press discussing the challenges facing the working people of socialist Poland under the circumstances that had arisen in the country', it continued to only quote *Trybuna Ludu*. From the report, only a very attentive reader could understand the scale of the events: 'From abroad to the Polish People's Republic, visitors are coming from Western countries, many of whom do not hide their anti-socialist views'. The report reflects the denigratory stylistics of Western politics inherent in the rhetoric of communist journalism: 'In the West, *a little idea* is being spread clearly for provocative purposes that conditions have been created in Poland for the so-called liberalisation process'. There is criticism of both US President Jimmy Carter, who was allegedly assessing the events 'according to his ill-fated view of "human rights"', as well as Ronald Reagan, who was speaking out 'even more openly', even though the position of this presidential candidate was not expounded upon. In order to understand the context, the following source should be taken into account: 'In the last week of August, a few days before the Gdańsk Agreement was announced, President Jimmy Carter sent a letter to British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, West German Chancellor Helmut Schmidt, and French President Giscard d'Estaing proposing that the four

⁸ Edward Gierek – First Secretary of the ruling Polish United Workers' Party (PZPR) in the Polish People's Republic from 20 December 1970 to 6 September 1980.

⁹ A publication about Gierek's second televised speech, where it was stated that 'the economic problems must be resolved gradually', and a report on the plenary session of the Central Committee of the PZPR, which presented the updated composition of the Central Committee, with a new prime minister. TASS-ELTA report 'On the events in Poland' (1980, August 28) about the *Trybuna Ludu* publication – that the material of the plenary session of the Central Committee was being 'widely discussed' in PZPR organisations, and that 'recently, Polish society has been taking note of the fact that the destructive activities of anti-socialist elements have intensified in the country.' ('Dėl įvykių Lenkijoje' ["On the events in Poland"] – *Tiesa*, 1980, August 28).

¹⁰ 'Warsaw. 02-Sep. According to the data published here, the number of strikes has fallen sharply both on the coast and across the country. In the cities, especially in Gdańsk, the port, shipyard and industrial enterprises have started working. Situation in Poland.' (*Tiesa*, 1980, September 3).

Western leaders share views and coordinate actions with regard to outgoing events in Poland'. He said that 'what is going on in Poland could precipitate far reaching consequences for East-West relations and even for the future of the Soviet Bloc itself' (MacEachin, 2001, p. 10).

The reaction of the Western media was described in the usual style of communist propaganda: 'FRG mass information bodies have launched an *unbridled* smear campaign against Poland ... essentially trying to interfere in Poland's internal affairs' ("Nežabota šmeižto kampanija" ["An unbridled smear campaign"] – *Tiesa*, 1980, August 30). As evidence of political hostility, all of the newspapers published a TASS bulletin from Lisbon: 'As has been learned here, there were regular broadcasts in Polish from the territory of Portugal during which instructions were given to the anti-socialist elements who instigated the workers of Gdańsk' ("Eteryje – kurstytojai" ["Instigators – on the air"] – *Komjaunimo tiesa*, 1980, September 16). This fact was 'exposed' by Secretary-General of the Portuguese Communist Party Álvaro Cunhal – the programmes were allegedly broadcast by RARET,¹¹ a station that belonged to the Voice of America, which is why he criticised that the programmes were being broadcast to socialist countries from Portugal.¹²

Tiesa also published a bulletin in which TASS denied the news circulated by the United Press that consultations were taking place between the US and USSR governments on the situation in Poland ("Visiškas prasimanymas" ["Complete fiction"] – *Tiesa*, 1980, September 13). Supposedly, 'similar reports are complete fiction'; TASS advised 'strict adherence to the principles of non-interference in internal affairs'. An article translated from Russian entitled 'Interference in internal affairs is not permitted' that was originally published in *Pravda*, the official newspaper of the CPSU, stated that 'the activities of the forces hostile to socialist Poland and their instigative and destructive work are intensifying' (*Tiesa*, 1980, September 23). The article goes on to claim that in the West, 'it is not limited to hostile propaganda through the *diversionary centres* of Radio Liberty and Radio Free Europe as well as Deutsche Welle, the Voice of America, and so on', but that 'anti-government activities in Poland are being financed through various "funds" in the United States and other Western countries'.

The introduction of the *Padėtis Lenkijoje* ('Situation in Poland') column in *Tiesa* (30 August–4 September) testified that the strikes forced the coordinators of the propaganda system to notice the protest as a phenomenon that could not be hushed up as it had been in July and the first weeks of August. *Czerwony Sztandar*, meanwhile, stood out from the rest of the Lithuanian press by publishing slightly more detailed reports from the same *Sytuacija w Polsce* [*Situation in Poland*] cycle based on *Trybuna Ludu* and PAP (one of which may have surprised readers because of a photograph printed next to the article showing a US police officer arresting a black man – the photograph does not have a caption, so looking at the page, one might assume that it was part of the article on Poland). In addition, *Czerwony Sztandar* published a historical text on 1 August about the Warsaw Uprising of 1944, although it made no mention of the Home Army [Polish: Armia Krajowa],¹³ which had organised the operation.

It is worth noting the characteristics of the communist rhetoric published in *Tiesa* for strike organisers, participants and supporters, which were carried over from the Polish communist press: '*Anti-socialist elements getting chummy* with workers' collectives' (according to *Żołnierz*

¹¹ Radio Free Europe was actually broadcast by Raret – Sociedade Anónima de Rádio – Retransmissão, Lda.

¹² Lithuanian SSR Radio began broadcasting English programming to the West on a daily basis in 1965; Moscow Radio began broadcasting communist propaganda programmes worldwide in 1930, and in 1980 they were available in 75 languages.

¹³ The Home Army – the largest part of the Polish resistance movement during World War II.

Wolności), ‘forces attempting to instil in people’s minds hostile beliefs with respect to the highest values’. Compared to the other press, *Czerwony Sztandar* avoided vulgar rhetoric in describing Western politicians and media outlets.

In general, the entire ‘output’ of news from Poland was translated from Russian and Polish sources. During that three-month period in 1980, there was only one original two-part publication: *Vilkai avelių kailiais* [English: ‘Wolves in sheep’s clothing’]. This was the first original article in *Tiesa* about the fact that ‘a surprising number of political figures have suddenly emerged in the West who, perhaps unexpectedly even to themselves, have begun to proclaim that they are “friends of the Polish nation”’, and specifically about Germany, that ‘the spirit of the “Brown Führer” is still alive on the Rhine’ (Kavaliauskas, “Vilkai avelių kailiais. ‘Herojus’ iš hitlerinio reicho” [“Wolves in sheep’s clothing. A ‘hero’ of the Hitler Reich”] – *Tiesa*, 1980, September 14) – here the author claims to have found revanchists who ‘are demanding vengeance, revenge, and are threatening the People’s Poland’. He claims to have seen a map in Cologne ‘showing German lands far to the east of the Oder-Neisse’. The author asks, ‘Hasn’t the reactionary leadership of the American trade unions exposed itself by banning its members from servicing ships carrying much-needed cargo to the Polish people?’ This sentence, by deconstructing the meanings accordingly, allows us to learn more than the purpose of the publication. A summary of the text: ‘Life in Polish cities, to the great anger of the enemies of the socialist regime, is normalising.’ Meanwhile, the two original articles in the Vilnius communist daily *Vakarinės naujienos* (about Gdańsk being the largest shipyard where ‘the construction of vessels for the fishing industry has a special place’ (Bazys, “Laivų statybos kalvė” [“Shipbuilding forge”] – *Vakarinės naujienos*, 1980, July 23), and about Gdynia also having a modern shipyard that sent most of its orders to the Soviet Union (Bazys, “Gdańskas – laivų statybos miestas” [“Gdańsk – a shipbuilding city”] – *Vakarinės naujienos*, 1980, July 22)) could not, in principle, expand the reader’s knowledge of current events.

In November 1980, R. W. Apple Jr., a correspondent for *The New York Times* in Moscow, reported that distribution of the Polish communist press had been discontinued in the territory of the USSR: ‘Polish periodicals, for example, have been removed from sale in the Baltic republics of Latvia and Lithuania.’ (Apple, “Russian Move into Poland Held Remote” – *The New York Times*, 1980, November 24). He went on to say that the entry of foreigners into Vilnius had also



Photo 1. A page of the daily *Czerwony Sztandar* (Issue of 3 September 1980): in the photo – a US police officer arrests a black man, and the title of the adjacent top article: “Situation in Poland”.

been restricted: 'The capital of Lithuania, Vilnius, which has a sizeable Polish population, has suddenly been ruled off-limits to foreigners.' Two foreign journalists were planning a trip to Vilnius, but, according to the correspondent, they were told that it was 'temporarily closed'. It should be clarified that starting in autumn, the official Polish press which did enter Lithuania, such as the women's magazine *Kobieta i Życie* that was popular in Lithuania or other subscription publications, were simply sent to the paper mill as waste paper on the pretext of 'inappropriate content'.

This was the context of the controlled public space: Lithuanians could only have been aware of the strikes as soon as they started in the neighbouring country from the broadcasts of the above-mentioned Western radio stations (which were called 'diversionary centres'), which were often subject to radio jamming, and the part of the population who read the Polish entertainment and cultural press that was available until November 1980 could understand the mood prevailing in Polish society. Thus, communist propaganda was and is in need of content deconstruction only to understand what angered the government, why it was disrupted, and what actions it could have taken.

Linguistically strong denigratory descriptions aimed at Western politicians and mass media outlets were commonplace in Soviet propaganda. But describing another – internal – enemy, turned out to be not so simple. An analysis of media texts testifies not only to the known fact that the instruction of the authorities not to use the word 'strike' for a long time was supposed to have given the impression that there was no organised workers' movement (as we could see from the content of the KGB reports examined later, 'Soviet mass media created a dead wall of silence around the strikes' (LSA, f. K35, inv. 2, c. 338, p. 23)). The texts suggest that the communist propagandists had a dilemma: how to present the mass public discontent. This is what became the bigger challenge for the communist government in the USSR and especially in Lithuania, where the population had historical and family ties with Poland. The goal of setting the societies in opposition by forming a critical attitude could not be achieved by bluntly condemning the workers' movement, as this would run counter to the ideological doctrine, so the glossary used for the articles was quite primitive, avoiding concreteness. The communist press was reluctant to publish in writing what the school principal had told the pupils about the Poles mentioned in the beginning of this article. However, it is precisely the propaganda context of public agitation against Polish society that provides an opportunity to more accurately deconstruct the content of the communist mass media – the official media outlets had to play an additional role in shaping hostile attitudes toward the events in Poland, and more attention was given to verbal propaganda and agitation at enterprises and establishments. On the other hand, the editors for the Lithuanian communist media were not original and proactive enough to produce hostile articles on their own, preferring to translate communist propaganda sources from Moscow and Warsaw instead. All this should have reinforced readers' distrust of official news, but it must be emphasised that the official press was not the only element of the propaganda system.

Agent Reports. The KGB Prepared for 'the Fight Against Communist Polish Citizens Coming to Lithuania'

Let us discuss another significant contextual element that expands knowledge not only about control of the public space, but also about opinion formation and the persecution of individuals: how the security service in Lithuania collected data about the events in Poland.

'Secret services are an important, integral element of Russian political culture', – Justyna Doroszcyk (2018, p. 11) narrates in an article about the oprichnina. In fact, many investigators and witnesses associate the history of the KGB with oprichnina's methods (Volchek, 2020). It is

precisely the activities of the KGB that cannot be separated from political culture, since culture and science were one of the main goals of the security service.

The KGB of the Lithuanian SSR used the professional competencies of recruits to collect information of interest from them after trips to communist Poland, or about the views and actions of people who visited from Poland. From the letters accompanying the reports of the agent-observers, it can be seen that the KGB helped to facilitate travel to the Polish People's Republic and to gather information through an extensive programme of meetings (in cooperation with *Służba Bezpieczeństwa*¹⁴). Therefore, intellectuals who served the regime were recruited for agency activities, and their opportunities to communicate were unrestricted. These agents not only reported on their travel agendas and the content of their meetings – they also provided summaries, conclusions and recommendations, in a way, unfortunately, that is typical when conducting scientific research. The content of the reports contrasts with the content of the official media discussed above; we also find remarks about the 'inefficiency' and 'bias' of the official media.

Among several agent files, we find extremely detailed reports about the events of 1980 in Poland written by one of the agents – a professor from the Vilnius Civil Engineering Institute¹⁵ who was giving an account of his trips to Toruń and Warsaw. Using the code name 'Antanaitis', he listed the people whom he had met with and gave his impressions in Russian, for example:

"I did not meet anyone who would positively assess the term of office of Gierek and his associates. The main, most common reproach is that Gierek purportedly created a superclass mafia of loyal, trustworthy individuals during his time in office. Material about the lifestyle of these individuals had been carefully gathered long before the current events and sufficient dossiers have been put together. Efforts were made to get those dossiers out of Poland. It is said that part of the material exposing them was deposited with the Communist Party Central Committees of Italy, Spain and France. *Even worse, in safes in the Vatican as well*, and so on. The public is shaken by a wave of rumours and talk about the 'peak'" (LSA, f. K35, inv. 2, c. 338, p. 26).

Although the professor agent reservedly emphasised *the disappointment of the Polish public* in the corruption and unacceptable rule of the communist government, another agent gave an even more complicated description of the situation in a report from a meeting of the leaders of the Lithuanian Communist Youth Union and the Polish Youth Socialist Union: 'Poland's communists are in a very difficult situation. They used to at least declare slogans. Now the situation is terrible – no one believes or sees any prospects'.¹⁶ Some things are repeated in the reports, which provides an opportunity to understand the mood of Polish society, the role of the opposition leadership, and interest in Lithuanians' relationship to the strikes and the rise of resistance.

Agent 'Antanaitis' wrote in an evaluative style, so a preconception can be sensed (taking into account that the report was written for the KGB), but he could not avoid the details that confirm the Poles' determination to oppose the regime. For example, he claimed that the 'Toruń intelligentsia' is allegedly 'afraid of a possible Soviet invasion' and emphasised in the same spot that they claimed 'that if that happens, the Poles, even the children, will resist to the very last.' (LSA, f. K35, inv. 2, c. 338, p. 21). In sharing his observations, the agent summed up:

¹⁴ The security service of communist Poland, 1956-1990.

¹⁵ Renamed 'Vilnius Tech' in 2020.

¹⁶ Information about the meeting of representatives of the Lithuanian Komsomol and the Ministry of Education of the Lithuanian SSR with department head of the Socialist Youth Union of Poland Jan Trawiński and Walka Młodych journalist Henryk Urbanowski (LSA, f. K35, inv. 2, c. 338, p. 16).

‘The USSR cannot help [the Poles] economically to the extent necessary, because the economic situation is no better than in the PRL’.

The professor also attended a Solidarity trade union lecture where members of the executive committee spoke. The agent described them in his report: ‘Wałęsa¹⁷ looks rather mediocre, likes to pose, and has no authority among the intelligentsia. However, he makes an impression on the workers’ (LSA, f. K35, inv. 2, c. 338, p. 21). Although the agent’s generalisations were biased in terms of the official position of the Soviet authorities, one can learn how the historical development of the Polish workers’ protests and resistance was interpreted:

“As a basis for action, there is the goal of revenging the defeat that many took personally when shots were fired into the workers’ demonstration in December 1970. Some of the leaders of Solidarity have relatives who were hurt and even died at that time. Judging from the speeches made by L. Wałęsa, G. Lenarczyk, W. Pietruszka and the main “ideologist” Gwiazda,¹⁸ preparatory work for precisely this type of action took the last few years” (LSA, f. K35, inv. 2, c. 338, p. 24).

The agent reported that there were disputes between the leaders of the ‘free’ unions, which was causing distrust among the workers; that, according to some Toruń intellectuals, they were puppets in the hands of the anti-Soviet element and were only being used as bait for leery workers (K35 inv. 2, c. 338, p. 22). The KGB officer supervising agent ‘Antanaitis’ spoke to him additionally in Vilnius and also presented the professor’s oral answers, which not only reflected the atmosphere, but also provided information about the people he had met:

“While in Warsaw, the source talked to Stanislaw Binkulski, dean of the University of Technology. He said he saw no reason to scream for change in the socialist regime [=in the Polish People’s Republic], because the Poles themselves are to blame for everything. The people drink, do not work, and engage in speculation” (LSA, f. K35, inv. 2, c. 338, p. 21).

‘Antanaitis’ communicated with ‘the teacher Frycz’,¹⁹ who was the leader of a group advocating for free trade union activities’. According to Frycz, the university in Toruń was preparing an ideological and economic programme on behalf of the free trade unions (LSA, f. K35, inv. 2, c. 338, p. 21). ‘Antanaitis’ emphasised the role of the media: ‘In general, attention must be paid to the ineffectiveness of the media and propaganda of the Soviet Union and the socialist countries. Individual drastic statements in the capitalist world about the situation led to the opposite effect among the Polish people than desired’ (LSA, f. K35, inv. 2, c. 338, p. 24). He mentioned the Poles’ impressions that both the Polish and, ‘even more so, the Soviet’ media had allegedly ‘artificially created’ a dead wall of silence around the strikes. Incidentally, the aforementioned professor had an order from the KGB officer who supervised him to also listen to what his student at the Civil Engineering Institute in Vilnius had to say about the events in Poland.

An agent with the code name ‘Šešupė’ who worked at another institution of higher education in Vilnius emphasised in a November 1980 report that the Poles were criticising the presentation of information about the circumstances behind the emergence and operation of Solidarity: ‘They would often argue, pointing to our press publications, that all this was being hidden from us, i.e. the people of the USSR’ (LSA, f. K35, inv. 2, c. 338, p. 10). He went on to say that ‘a large role

¹⁷ Lech Wałęsa – leader of the Solidarity free trade union.

¹⁸ Andrzej Gwiazda – one of the founders of the Free Trade Unions of the Coast and a member of the Presiding Committee of the Strike at the Lenin Shipyard in Gdańsk in August 1980.

¹⁹ Jerzy Bogumił Frycz (1927-1985), art historian, monument conservator in Bydgoszcz, associate professor at the Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń. In 1980 – deputy dean of the Faculty of Fine Arts.

in shaping public opinion in Poland now belongs to unofficial small-circulation newspapers of a wide range of political directions and the most extreme ideological views. A significant flow of this press revolves within the academic community, between students and teachers'. According to this agent's report 'on meetings with professors and senior staff from institutes in various sectors of the economy', 'during the conversations, the interlocutors basically supported the creation of the so-called free trade unions' (LSA, f. K35, inv. 2, c. 338, p. 11).

In the summer of 1981, the KGB Collegium of the Lithuanian SSR discussed the influence of Polish citizens and the Polish press on Lithuanian society, and recommended that information flows be narrowed even further. Meanwhile, for 'the fight against communist Polish citizens coming to Lithuania', the KGB expanded its agent infiltration methodology 'taking into account available data on hostile actions of reactionary emigration against the republic using the territory of the PRL, as well as activation of the activities of the Polish clergy and Solidarity in order to have a negative impact on persons of Polish nationality living in the republic.' (Decision of the KGB Collegium of the Lithuanian SSR: 26 June 1981. LSA, f. K51, inv. 4, c. 2, p. 37). In 1981, the KGB decided to further obstruct the activities of Polish priests in Lithuania and instructed the Fifth Chief Directorate to 'localise the negative activities of Polish clergy coming to the republic, and, to this end, the operational positions in Polish parishes between the priesthood and the most active members of the church' (LSA, f. K51, inv. 4, c. 2, p. 58); in the introduction to this article, it also decided to subject members of the aforementioned Catholic Committee for the Defence of the Rights of Believers to 'precautionary measures aimed at shackling their extremist actions and halting their planned mass anti-social campaigns'.

At the same time, Polish communist security agents were stepping up surveillance of the Lithuanian population in Poland, or more precisely – in the so-called 'Suwalki triangle'.²⁰ The KGB documents also show a collaborative relationship in this respect between the aforementioned Polish security service, the KGB headquarters in Moscow, and its branch – the Lithuanian SSR KGB. Moscow informed Vilnius that the United Lithuanian Relief Fund of America²¹ was sending 500 parcels a year to Lithuanians, of which '90 per cent go to residents of the Suwalki triangle' (LSA, f. K35, inv. 2, c. 338, p. 9). The Polish security service, which collected data about these residents, helped the Lithuanian SSR division of the KGB establish Lithuanians' ties with diaspora organisations around the world and the information sources reporting abroad about what was going on in Poland.

Lithuanian Emigrants Discuss the Future of Poland: A Position of Solidarity

In November 1980, a second conference was held in Madrid to discuss implementation of the agreements of the Helsinki Accords (1975). At the conference, the events in Poland were already an imperative topic. One of the two Lithuanian participants at the conference was Tomas Venclova, a dissident who had been living in the United States since 1977 and was a member of the Public Group to Promote the Implementation of the Helsinki Accords in Lithuania. Venclova admitted on Radio Liberty that he had spoken on the phone 'with one of the defenders of Polish workers' rights.' At that time, six months after the establishment and expansion of the trade unions in Poland, one of the most pressing issues being discussed both in Poland and abroad was

²⁰ Suwalki County (Polish: powiat suwalski) – a unit of territorial administration (powiat) in north-eastern Poland.

²¹ 'The Foundation acts as a guardian of traitors to the motherland, and takes part, together with employees of the US Immigration Service, in a survey of Soviet citizens arriving for permanent residence from the republic in the United States' (LSA, f. K35, inv. 2, c. 338, p. 9; translation from Russian).

whether the USSR would bring in troops to quell the movement. Venclova said that this would be a fatal mistake on the part of the Politburo of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (LSA, f. K50, inv. 2, c. 65, p. 32).

Venclova opened up about the atmosphere at the conference in Madrid, claiming that the participants were worried that the Soviet delegation would leave the event: 'We thought that if it did, it would be a bad sign for Poland. But since it didn't, we, as well as the Polish representatives, decided that it was a good sign'. Although the world – especially the Polish communities and those that sympathised with them – feared a Soviet invasion into Poland's internal affairs, it did not believe in such a development; the Lithuanian press in the United States was also following what experts knew about it. For example, *Draugas*, the largest Lithuanian daily in the United States, once reported that: 'Zbigniew Brzeziński, National Security Advisor to the current president, stated that the government did not believe that a Soviet invasion would take place immediately or that it was inevitable' ("Lenkija apsupta rusų divizijų" ["Poland is surrounded by Russian divisions"]) – *Draugas*, 1980, December 6).

The aforementioned Tomas Venclova, who was one of the most famous Lithuanian intellectuals in the West, said that 'all Lithuanians abroad and all Lithuanians in the Homeland must *welcome and support the events in Poland*' (LSA, f. K51, inv. 4, c. 2, p. 59), and that he personally was a 'restrained optimist' in terms of the events. It is this position that should be singled out in the context of the press of the Lithuanian diaspora community in the United States and in the context of its dialogue with Polish emigrants. It was a position of solidarity that stimulated discussion among the older generation of emigrants, based primarily on the historical experiences of complicated relations between Lithuania and Poland.

In other words, it should not have been enough for Lithuanians abroad to get just a chronicle of events where the style also reflected an anti-communist stance ('Prime Minister of Poland Józef Pińkowski was to meet with the leaders of the new Solidarity trade unions, but the prime minister, together with Communist Party leader Kania, was called to Moscow. There they *exchanged kisses* with Brezhnev, but had to answer unpleasant questions from Kremlin leaders at the Kremlin' ("Kremlius įspėjo Lenkijos vadus" ["The Kremlin warned Polish commanders"]) – *Draugas*, 1980, November 1)). Thus, the events prompted consideration of the prospects for Lithuanian-Polish relations. The strikes and especially the formation of free trade unions gave this discussion features relevant in the Lithuanian diaspora press. Usually, the Lithuanian emigrants based themselves on their knowledge and experience of Lithuanian-Polish relations between 1919 and 1939, but in view of the growing conflict between the Polish workers with the communist government, they tried to overcome their preconceived scepticism about possible relations. It is clear from the publications how the Lithuanian refugees displaced by World War II and their descendants discussed the relationship of the new Poland with Lithuania. Analysis of the press shows that Lithuanian society and Lithuanians abroad were concerned about the growing resistance to the authorities not only from the historical aspect, but from the current aspect as well. As the events in Poland gained momentum, the scale of the controversy can even be illustrated by the selection of two typical publications.

For instance, *Draugas* asked: 'Is it appropriate for Lithuanians to pray for Poles?' (Kuprionis, "Lietuvių – lenkų santykių problema. Ar dera lietuviams už lenkus melstis?" ["The problem of Lithuanian-Polish relations. Is it appropriate for Lithuanians to pray for Poles?"]) – *Draugas*, 1981, July 16). The author of the publication wrote:

"Given, in emigration, some Poles, especially the older generation, still tease Lithuanians by "sighing" about getting back Vilnius. Many a Lithuanian is also inclined to toss an unfavourable

word toward the Poles. It is easy to understand that these are not expressions of deeper thinking, but more of emotions. This is why in emigration it is necessary to evaluate any statements that lead to becoming close. [...] Who knows, the need to act together again like in the battlefields of Grunwald may recur”.

In another publication, which was prepared before the introduction of martial law, there was Tomas Venclova's position (1982, p. 11):

“So our hatred of the Poles over the denationalisation of a large part of the Lithuanian nation is really more of an irrational outburst of fear of our own inner weakness. [...] Today, our interests and those of the Polish nation coincide, if not one hundred per cent (things like that never happen), then maybe ninety-five. Like during the Battle of Grunwald. Like during the wars with Moscow and the Tatars. Like during the Kościuszko Uprising”.

In 1981, Lithuanian and Polish diaspora organisations finally resumed dialogue, which was described in a Lithuanian publication as follows:

“13 August 1981 – Lithuanian American Community liaison in Washington Viktoras Nakas and Lithuanian American Community liaison for International Affairs Algimantas Gureckas visited the office of the Polish American Congress in Washington, DC, where they had a more than an hour-long conversation with Zdzisław Dziekoński,^[22] the organisation's representative in Washington. [...] He would like to see Lithuania regain its independence. He also agrees that Vilnius should belong to Lithuania [shows concern regarding worship in Lithuanian at the Sejny²³ church]. 11 September – A press release was issued on behalf of the Polish American Congress informing about the telegrams sent by Congress President Aloysius Mazewski to US Senator C. Percy and Congressman C. Collins regarding the rescue of Vytautas Skuodis.^[24] The telegram asked to step up the liberation campaign for Lithuanian American Vyt. Skuodis” (Gč., “LB tęsia dialogą su Amerikos lenkų kongresu” – *Draugas*, October 16, p. 3).

This was one of the general signs of interaction that began to be sought after discussions in the press. This interaction was important, at least in part, in neutralising the distrust in the Polish movement instigated in Lithuania by the security services and communist propaganda, as news about it reached the population through Western radio stations. The rational attitude to the Solidarity trade union movement in Poland not only renewed the public debate among Lithuanian emigrants on relations with Poland, but also led to a useful dialogue between Polish and Lithuanian organisations in the United States.

In summary, it would be possible to single out the key elements that affected the public space of the Lithuanian SSR and which show that there was an even deeper communication crisis created by the communist government structures:

This model of restricting public space is based on both open and secret influencing factors. Firstly, the communist media shaped the content in such a way as to perpetuate the hostility between the communist camp and the West, avoiding a critical attitude toward Polish society and the growing trade union movement (that the ‘work stoppages’ were allegedly a consequence of Western incitement). Meanwhile, university lecturers, public lecturers, teachers and managers were trained to fabricate an extremely critical attitude toward the Polish workers’ movement in

²² Krajowy Dyrektor Kongresu Polonii Amerykańskiej i Prezes Rady Powierników.

²³ Sejny is a part of the Suwalki triangle, which belongs to Poland. Sejny is the centre of cultural activity of the Lithuanian national minority in Poland.

²⁴ Lithuanian geologist, doctor of natural sciences, participant of the dissident movement. Arrested for anti-Soviet activities in 1979 and sentenced in 1980 to 12 years in prison camps. Deported from the USSR in 1987.

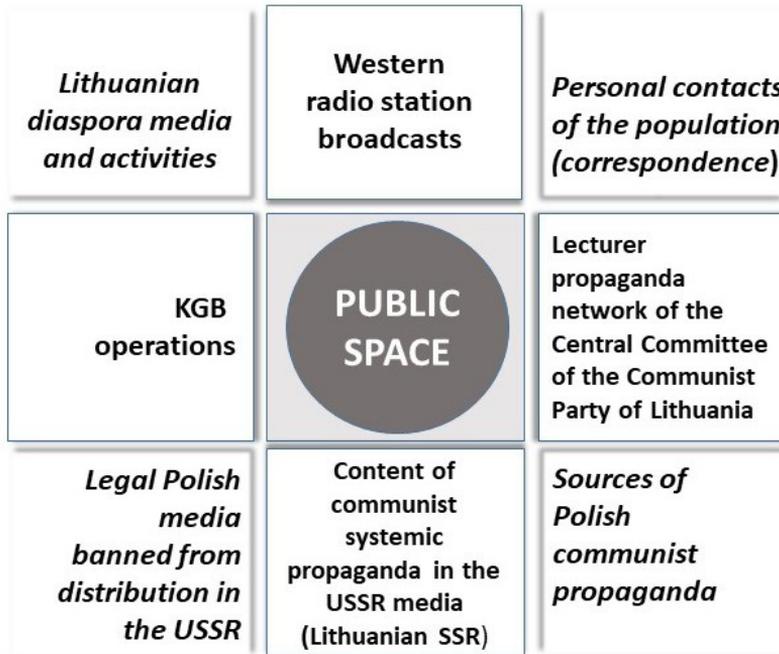


Fig. 1. Key elements that affected the public space of the Lithuanian SSR.

Source: own study.

lessons and lectures. And finally, the KGB tried to gather as much information as possible through individuals' professional and family ties with Poland and influence public space: (a) so that agents disseminated a critical opinion in Lithuania; (b) so that the KGB headquarters in Moscow had information about specific Polish actors and institutions that the agents had visited. We cannot measure the impact of Western radio broadcasts directly – only on the basis of recollections and studies,²⁵ but this element has always been historically significant in Lithuania, despite the fact that it was viewed negatively in the public space by official propaganda. The lightly highlighted actors could not directly influence the public space (especially when, as of November 1980, even the communist Polish press was banned from distribution in the USSR, and especially in Lithuania), but they were sources of information reflected in the activities of other actors.

Conclusions

Even though there were very stringent restrictions on the information available to Lithuanian residents in 1980-1981 about the workers' strikes and the formation of the Solidarity trade unions in Poland, they did have two opportunities to understand the real causes and development of the current events in Poland:

- 1) By receiving news from Western radio stations in Lithuanian or in other languages that they knew (Polish, Russian), despite the fact that part of the broadcasts was subject to radio jamming;

²⁵ About Voice of America broadcasts to Soviet Lithuania: Arlauskaitė-Zakšauskienė, 2019, p. 248.

- 2) By deconstructing the texts of the propaganda media, taking into account their bias and the use of Stalinist vocabulary in descriptions of Western political leaders, media outlets, diaspora organisations and prominent Polish opposition figures. This deconstruction would have required the ability to critically evaluate the entire propaganda discourse (including informal 'education'), distinguishing the characteristic meanings in the communist media for describing events and comparing them with emerging new ones.

The events in Poland led to a more pressing discussion in the Lithuanian American mass media, which also led to a dialogue between Lithuanian and Polish diaspora organisations.

On the other hand, even though information about Solidarity made its way into Lithuania through various channels, no objective public dialogue about Solidarity was possible in the tightly controlled public space, because the Lithuanian SSR KGB had stepped up surveillance of the population in terms of the events in Poland: the security service followed various groups possibly related to Poland and foreign Lithuanian diaspora (residents with relatives in Poland; priests; dissidents; students); the USSR KGB, in cooperation with the Polish security service, contributed to the surveillance of Polish nationals (those who supported Solidarity or were critical of the communist regime) by obtaining information from persons recruited in Poland who visited the target groups (in general, this topic on the surveillance of residents of Polish origin by the security services of the Lithuanian SSR would require a separate investigation, as it covers an even broader period). The KGB agents of the Lithuanian SSR who attended meetings with professors at Polish higher education institutions for academic purposes reported a relatively real social atmosphere, which was never described in the communist press.

The information isolation deepened Lithuania's internal communication crisis – with government bodies officially and unofficially disseminating a critical attitude toward the formation of Polish trade unions and the workers' demands, in an effort to set the public opinion of the Lithuanian and Polish people in opposition, even more mistrust should have emerged, and not only in the propaganda system, but especially among the different social groups where attempts were being made to spread false information about Solidarity in various ways. Societies with similar historical experiences strive to overcome restrictions and obtain information of interest to them; based on this principle of historicity, we can conclude that informational (not just physical) demarcation was supposed to promote the alienation of societies and isolate them from the analysis of natural social processes. This was a very important aspect of the crisis, considering that among the key events in Polish history over the centuries, Lithuania's role had always been an active one. With the official legal press presenting a one-sided position expressed in an attack on Solidarity, we notice that the people who belonged to the propaganda system, even though they were not inventive or proactive, essentially conveyed a vulgar, Stalinist assessment. Therefore, only the analysis of other sources allows us to expand our knowledge not only about how informed the Lithuanian population was, but also about what other means the government used to narrow or change the information about Poland.

The Lithuanian SSR division of the KGB also analysed foreign media reports, comparing them with incoming agency reports. All the information it received was passed on to the KGB headquarters in Moscow in order to draw general conclusions about the real mood in Poland and about the possible actions of the USSR with respect to communist Poland. It can be assumed that it was precisely in this way that the generalised information that reached the USSR leadership about the real frame of mind in Polish society with respect to the communist regime may have later played a part in Moscow's historic decision to allow the Polish communist leadership to introduce martial law in 1981 itself without USSR military 'assistance'.

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