



LIETUVOS RESPUBLIKOS VYRIAUSYBĖS KANCELIARIJA

OFFICE OF THE GOVERNMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF LITHUANIA

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Esteemed Rabbi David Niederman,

On behalf of the Prime Minister of the Republic of Lithuania, I would like to thank you for the letter received on the 4th of August 2015 concerning the historic Šnipiškės cemetery and the Vilnius Congress Centre.

I want to assure you that the history of Lithuanian Jews and its memorials are of high importance to the Government of the Republic of Lithuania and Lithuania's people because the activities of Lithuanian Jews have been contributing to the beauty and fame of our country for centuries. Thanks to the efforts of the prominent Gaon, famous rabbinate and people active in the field of culture, Vilnius became one of the spiritual centres for the European Jews.

The Government of the Republic of Lithuania aims to buy the Vilnius Sports Palace and to tidy the territory containing the old Šnipiškės Jewish cemetery. We must admit that the territory in question became a shabby place in Vilnius while being in private hands. After the reconstruction of the building, which was built forty years ago, and its territory, the Government of the Republic of Lithuania guarantees that only prestigious and important events will be held there. In addition, we would like to note that the Government of the Republic of Lithuania aims to prepare a common detailed plan of the territory of the Šnipiškės cemetery.

We would like to inform you that for many years the Government of the Republic of Lithuania has been cooperating with the Committee for the Preservation of Jewish Cemeteries in Europe headed by the Esteemed Rabbi Elyakim Schlesinger. The American Jewish Congress and other worldwide Jewish organizations recommended this Committee to us. The supervision of the abovementioned organization is a guarantee that the Šnipiškės cemetery will receive high respect. Moreover, we would like to inform you that we constantly keep contacts with Ms Faina Kukliansky, the chairperson of the Jewish (Litvak) Community of Lithuania, and inform her about the progress achieved in implementing the project.

On the 14th of April 2015, the Prime Minister of the Republic of Lithuania Algirdas Butkevičius received at the Government of the Republic of Lithuania the members of the Committee for the Preservation of Jewish Cemeteries in Europe and the Jewish (Litvak) Community of Lithuania and discussed the project of conversion of the Vilnius Sports Palace into the Congress Centre to be implemented in parallel with the project on the commemoration of the old Šnipiškės Jewish cemetery.

We would like to inform you that on the 9th of June 2015 the Government of the Republic of Lithuania adopted the Resolution No 597 on the implementation of the project. In compliance with the Resolution, the project for reconstruction of Vilnius Congress and Sports Palace and its conversion for congress, conference, and culture events has been recognized as an economic project of State importance.. May we bring to your attention the fact that the negotiations on the acquisition of the Sports Palace are currently underway with the owners *AB Šiaulių Bankas* and are expected to be completed in the near future, then the building will be registered in the name of the State. Later the preparation of the investment project concerning the building in question will begin; the decision-making concerning the investment project will be coordinated with the Committee for the Preservation of Jewish Cemeteries in Europe and the Jewish (Litvak) Community of Lithuania.

We would like to assure you that no works will be carried out inside the building of the Vilnius Sports Palace without prior informing the Committee for the Preservation of Jewish Cemeteries in Europe or the Jewish (Litvak) Community of Lithuania; the surface of the ground in the rest of the territory of the cemetery that was covered by concrete plates 45 years ago will remain intact; the location of the main entrance and exit points of the building will be such that people will not walk on the plates covering the remains and the future Congress Centre will function ensuring proper respect for the sanctity of the cemetery.

We would like to assure you once again that the Government of the Republic of Lithuania appreciates the importance of the old Šnipiškės Jewish cemetery and is of the opinion that with the participation of the representatives of the Committee for the Preservation of Jewish Cemeteries in Europe as well as the Jewish (Litvak) Community of Lithuania and in line with the provisions of the Agreement signed in 2009 we plan to duly commemorate the old Šnipiškės Jewish cemetery in remembrance of those buried there.

In addition, I would like to take this opportunity to thank you and your colleagues for the attention paid to the history of the Lithuanian Jews.

Rimantas Vaitkus
First deputy chancellor of the Government

