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the bagel shop

Timeline of Recent Events in the Community



Dear reader,

I invite you to look through this latest issue of the Bagel Shop Newsletter covering the important events and moments at the Lithuanian Jewish Community from January to June of 2023. In this issue we set ourselves an important mission: to bring attention to and unite our forces against the rapidly rising wave of anti-Semitism and hate crimes around the world.

As you leaf through this newsletter, you'll find these increasing acts of anti-Semitism today are causing great unease for our community. Today like never before it's crucial to stand up and confront courageously this problem and to join forces in finding a way to effectively stop those who spread hate and discrimination. Unlike we are being told, freedom of speech is not absolute. And only we, each of us individually and all of us together, can draw that red line which no one should transgress. In this issue of the Bagel Shop Newsletter our correspondents, academic, cultural and social figures who have achieved much in their fields, talk about this issue who, having observed over the past 30 years this unprecedented campaign of anti-Semitism, simply couldn't remain silent. Thank you for your support because only all of us together can preserve diversity and inclusion. By demonstrating and enjoying the richness of our society we can build the kind of country where everyone can enjoy a good life and carry on their traditions, and share with others the best and most delicious of what we have.

With that in mind, this issue includes several special interviews and an overview of Litvak/Jewish cuisine, including recipes, plus the stories behind those recipes.

I sincerely hope this issue of the Bagel Shop Newsletter will inspire you and refresh you with a sense of pride in our common legacy.

Forever yours,

Faina Kukliansky, chairwoman
Lithuanian Jewish Community



The teacher trainings were very successful with more than 200 participants. The program continues, so stay tuned.

- Two-day educational workshops with the Roma and Jewish communities. From January to June the Lithuanian Jewish Community, the Roma agency Padėk Pritapti and the Lithuanian Human Rights Center held 9 two-day training workshops around Lithuania intended for Lithuanian teachers, educators

and youth workers. The goal of the workshops was to introduce attendees who work with young people to the customs and traditions of ethnic minority communities living in Lithuania and to debunk a number of stereotypes as well as to provide methods for fighting anti-Semitism and Romophobia.



- On January 27 the Lithuanian Jewish Community marked International Holocaust Victims' Remembrance Day as we do annually, remembering the 6 million victims of the Holocaust. Cantor Shmuel Yatom recited prayers at the Old Jewish Cemetery in Vilnius and at the Ponar Memorial Complex where around 70,000 Jews were murdered.

- In late January the BBC aired a documentary film in which Imperial War Museum historian James Bulgin revealed some facts from the history of the Holocaust which were disturbing to many. The film can be viewed here:



- The European Jewish Leadership Conference was held in Jerusalem in January. During her trip there Lithuanian Jewish Community chairwoman Faina Kukliansky was invited to meet Israeli president Isaac Herzog. They discussed pressing issues for Lithuania's Jews during their meeting. The president also spoke about his great-grandfather's hometown Šeduva.

Did you know the 11th president of Israel, from a family of famous politicians, has Litvak roots? Shmuel Yitzhak Hilman was born in Šeduva in the Radviliškis district of Lithuania in 1868. He studied Torah with his uncle in Pašvitinys, a town near Šiauliai, and in Pasvalys, Lithuania. At the age of 29 he became rabbi for the town of Byerazino in the Minsk guberniya, and then in 1908 was appointed rabbi for the city of Glasgow in Scotland. Thousands attended his funeral in Jerusalem in 1953.

Isaac Herzog was born in Tel Aviv in independent Israel in 1960. The future president, then Israeli minister for social services and welfare, visited the first March of the Living in Lithuania in 2009. He was inaugurated president of Israel on July 7, 2021.



Lithuanian Jewish Community chairwoman Faina Kukliansky and Israeli president Isaac Herzog

1 p. ►

• This year as Vilnius celebrates its 700th birthday, the Lithuanian Jewish Community presented a special birthday calendar as the Jewish calendar for 2023 with a specially-created Vilne 700 logo. The semantic strata of the logo includes the letters of Gediminas and the ancient chronicles, but also the Torah scroll and the wisdom parchments of the Vilna Gaon, as well as a Vilnius Baroque motif and an allusion to photographic and cinematic drama and documentary.

"The Lithuanian Jewish Community through this logo reminds every-

one there is still a place for the Jewish community in Lithuania, even if that community isn't numerous, but nonetheless still live in the city of their forefathers and remember who, along with Vilnius residents of other ethnicities, created, built and fostered Vilnius over many long centuries. After all, being a Vilner Jew, being the heir of the history and culture of the capital of Yiddishland, is not just an honor and a privilege, it is a responsibility before future generations. Because we live as long as Memory lives," Lithuanian Jewish Community chairwoman Faina Kukliansky said.



The Jewish calendar for 2023 features collages reflecting the Jewish life of Old Vilne. The calendar was conceived and designed by the JUDVI & AŠ design group.

• In February the Lithuanian Jewish Community began a new and entertaining series of quizzes called "Know Your History." Everyone, young and old, were and are invited to test their knowledge, in family or other teams or as individuals, of Litvak and Jewish history and culture. Small prizes were and are awarded the winners.



• In February the chairman Rabbi Andrew Baker from the American Jewish Committee and the chairwoman attorney and LJC director Faina Kukliansky of the Goodwill Foundation held a press conference to announce the requirements of programs for Holocaust victims and their descendants to receive symbolic restitution for personal property seized during foreign occupations of Lithuania during World War II. The plan is to distribute from 5 to 10 million euros which the Lithuanian Government allocated for this purpose.

• The LJC celebrated the happiest of Jewish holidays, Purim. We learned how to make the delicious traditional pastry hamentashen and why they're called that. The traditional Litvak recipe can be found here:



• For the second year now the Lithuanian Jewish Community has been visiting Ukrainian child refugees during Purim. This year chairwoman Kukliansky arrived with full trays of traditional hamentashen for the children at the International Ukraine School, told the children the story of Purim and the traditions surrounding it and spoke with the extraordinarily friendly staff there who basically transformed what had been a ruined building into an educational facility with their own hands over the course of several months.



• On March 15 Lithuania marked the Lithuanian Day of Jewish Rescuers for the first time. A special medal and symbol of thanks designed by the JUDVI & AŠ design group at the request of the International Commission for Assessing the Crimes of the Nazi and Soviet Regimes was unveiled which will mark the locations where the rescuers lived and hid Jews from the Nazis.

• On March 24 following six years of reconstruction work the old Jewish synagogue in Kupiškis once again opened its doors to the public. The city's public library is now housed on the first floor.

"There was a large Jewish community in Kupiškis before World War II. Unfortunately almost the entire population was exterminated by the Nazis and local collaborators. It is fitting that at least after 80 years this history is remembered again, and this building will remind those residents who enter here or pass by outside of the huge contribution Jews made to the flourishing of this community," chairwoman Kukliansky said at the ceremonial re-opening.



• On April 26 the LJC's Seniors' Club celebrated 25 years since its inception. At the birthday celebration a great number of our senior citizens gathered and thanked the volunteers who have been working for the club since its earliest days. An Israel Air Force sergeant delivered an interesting presentation. Viljamas Žitkauskas who has now worked as a tourist guide in five countries also spoke about the state of Israel. Participants lit candles in memory of those who have perished defending the historic Jewish homeland and members of the seniors' club who have gone on to eternal rest. Seniors, club staff volunteers and others looked through photo albums and recalled everything that's happened over the last 25 years.

• On April 18 this year we marked Yom haShoah, Israeli Holocaust remembrance day, with a series of events and commemoration ceremonies in Vilnius and around the country. Visitors came from around the world, including from the Association of Lithuanian Jews in Israel, who in concert with the Lithuanian Jewish Community organized events in Alytus and Zarasai, Lithuania. Members of the delegations met with mayors and staff, visited the recently-restored synagogue in Alytus which now houses the municipality's Audiovisual Arts Center and paid their respects in memory of the thousands of Jews murdered in both towns.



• In April American media star, commentator, attorney and now director of the United States' Commission for the Preservation of American Heritage Abroad Star Jones visited Lithuania and signed a memorandum of agreement with the Lithuanian Jewish Community for a joint project for restoring the second storey of the renovated synagogue in Žiežmariai, the so-called women's gallery. The US Commission pledged to find financing for the project up to \$75,000. The LJC will insure the smooth and full implementation of the project.



• On May 30 a commemorative plaque was unveiled on the side of the building at the intersection of Juozo Grudžio and Smalininkų streets in Kaunas to mark the site of the former Jewish orphanage there. The building was acquired by the Association of Jewish Orphanage Homes in 1905 and took in boys aged 7 to 18 who

didn't have parents or didn't have stable homes. The orphanage was known as the Rabbi Yitzhak Elkhanan Spektor Children's Home and included a synagogue and primary school, with evening classes for older boys. The Benayahu and Blumenthal families from Israel financed the commemorative plaque.



• The wooden synagogue in Kurkliai, Lithuania opened its doors to visitors in June. It is one of just a handful of wooden synagogues still standing in Europe. It is believed it will become an attraction for locals from the region and foreign tourists. Visitors will be able to view an exhibit on the once-large Jewish population of Kurkliai. This represents another example of successful cooperation between the Lithuanian Jewish Community and local cultural centers.

• This year we celebrated the 100th birthday of Herman Perelstein, the founder of the Ažuoliukas choir. On June 16 a bas-relief commemorating the famous conductor was unveiled at the Lithuani-

an National Philharmonic in Vilnius. The bas-relief was a joint project by the Vilnius Jerusalem of Lithuania Jewish Community, its chairman Algirdas Malcas and the sculptor Mindaugas Šnipas.

Anti-Semitism under Cover of Freedom of Speech

Lithuanian member of parliament Remigijus Žemaitaitis took to facebook in early May and attacked Jews and Israel for tearing down an unsafe school in Palestine, about which he didn't have all the facts. Despite a rising storm of public anger over his statements, he kept going and his anti-Semitic statements continue even now.



Faina Kuklinsky / LJC photo

Lithuanian Jewish Community chairwoman **Faina Kuklinsky** was among the first to respond to Žemaitaitis.

“If you didn’t know this man, you might think these were illogical rantings. But they weren’t intended for Lithuanian Jews, they were aimed at the Lithuanian public.

“It’s unethical to make an analogy between the war going on in Israel and anti-Semitic statements in Lithuania and Europe. If Mr. Žemaitaitis has made a mistake, let’s give him a chance to apologize,” she said.



Gintaras Varnas / photo by J. Stacevičius / LRT.lt

Gintaras Varnas:
“Disgusting and Shameful”

Gintaras Varnas, one of the best-known stage directors in Lithuania and the recipient of numerous awards, described the situation precisely.

“... ‘Take a stick, children, and BEAT THAT JEW TO DEATH,’ I’m quoting from the facebook profile of Žemaitaitis who gladly recalls this shameful Lithuanian children’s song as an example of our profound and ancient hatred of our Jewish fellow citizens. You’re supposed to realize that even in our folklore once upon a time we invited children to beat Jews to death, so come to your own conclu-

sion. “Isn’t this incitement to ethnic hate? Isn’t this incitement to commit violence against Jews? That’s exactly how I understood it. Will we return to the time of shooting Jews?”

„This is disgusting and shameful. The member of parliament, it seems, has inherited the most shameful Lithuanian gene, the Jew-shooter gene. Of the white arm-bander Lithuanians who in World War II shot and threw into pits without scruple just because they were Jews. And there’s no need, there’s no need any longer, to hide that terrible shame in the Lithuanian rue garden, to hide or try to wash it away somehow, by saying oh, it was the Nazis who did the shooting, and if there were one or two Lithuanians who did take part, they were forced to by the Nazis, and so on.

“It was shown long ago that between 10,000 and 15,000 Lithuanians took part in the extermination of Jews, directly or indirectly (bureaucratically by signing different orders). And they weren’t force, they did so of their free will. There was even Impulevičius’s Lithuanian battalion of Jew-shooters. To my mind this is the most shameful page in the history of the Lithuanians. For which we must apologize and repent for a long time to come. But look, here we have a new generation of Jew-shooters right here in the parliament of the Republic of Lithuania. A parliamentarian. For shame.

“By the way, there is another detail which reveals the genetic relationship between the new and old anti-Semitism. Back then they used to say: ‘I didn’t shoot people, I shot Jews’ (the saying comes from the testimony of a Holocaust criminal in court and was used in the play Gėtas). And today it sounds very familiar: “another group of animals” (I’m quoting Remigijus Žemaitaitis).

„I hope he chokes on his hate. Voters, don’t forget this man. And to law enforcement, I wish them a good investigation and ... results.

“And to the president of the country, I would wish you to think a little bit or find cleverer advisors before expressing your opinion. Because the only argument for his opinion, ‘this will harm the country’s image,’ is simply pitiful. It shows that the (current) president only cares about PR, his neighbors’ opinions, and not about the phenomenon itself, or its anti-human essence. Another shame. Mr. President, at least apologize to the Jews, our citizens who live in Lithuania. It would be nice. The foreign ambassadors responded much more strongly and emotionally,” Gintaras Varnas wrote.



Israeli ambassador to Lithuania Hadas Wittenberg Silverstein, courtesy LJC/ LJC photo

Israel Ambassador Clarifies School Issue, Condemns Anti-Semitic Statements

Israel’s ambassador to Lithuania Hadas Wittenberg Silverstein responded to Žemaitaitis’s initial statement about the school in Palestine. “We were shocked when we saw member of Lithuanian parliament Remigijus Žemaitaitis’s statements on social media about the Palestinian school near Bethlehem. The position taken doesn’t just conflict with the reality, bearing in mind the building was built without adhering to the mandatory safety requirements, it was unsafe and it was removed for that reason,” she said.

“Respecting freedom of speech, we emphasize that criticism of Israeli actions and policies is one thing, but clearly anti-Semitic comments are another thing entirely,” the ambassador said.

„Remigijus Žemaitaitis, exploiting this occasion, sought to legitimize anti-Semitic positions and the killing of Jews. We severely condemn the commentary by this member of the Seimas and all forms of anti-Semitism and hate. During the Holocaust the Nazis and local collaborators, implementing these kinds of anti-Semitic positions, exterminated 95% of Lithuania’s Jews, men, women and children. Recalling this brutal and tragic page of history and understanding that statements by government officials have influence over societal attitudes, we call upon the member of Seimas to apologize for his words, painful to the members of the Jewish community who survived the catastrophe of the Holocaust and insulting to the memory of the victims of that brutal period,” the Israeli ambassador said.

German Ambassador Condemns Statements as Well

Angered by Žemaitaitis’s posts, German ambassador to Lithuania Matthias Sonn released a statement, calling Žemaitaitis’s words horrific and anti-Semitic.

„This kind of hate-filled and horrific anti-Semitic statement is shocking to hear from the lips of a member of a parliament in our European family, especially on Europe Day, the day when we all proudly celebrate our common European Union values.



German ambassador to Lithuania Matthias Sonn, LJC archives

“I can only second the disgust expressed by my colleague from Israel and add my own personal disgust at this nauseating demonstration of murderous hate-speech. It has to be said that this is wholly unconnected with an ascent towards or disagreement with Israel’s policies and actions.

“In light of these horrifying statements, I officially express Germany’s solidarity with the Lithuanian Jewish community, of whom barely five percent survived the Nazi German occupation of Lithuania from 1941 to 1944.

“Also, I reaffirm that my country firmly supports conscientious Lithuanians from across the political spectrum who today dare stand up and confront the horrors of the Holocaust they and their compatriots committed in their country during the Holocaust,” ambassador Sonn said.



United States ambassador to Lithuania Robert Gilchrist, courtesy US Embassy Vilnius

US Ambassador Speaks Out

United States ambassador to Lithuania Robert Gilchrist also released a statement condemning the MP’s anti-Semitic statements: “I was very troubled when I learned about the member of parliament’s comments justifying anti-Semitism. It’s permissible to express disagreement with the policies and actions of other governments, but anti-Semitism and fanaticism should never be rationalized. The future of Lithuania belongs to those who speak out for tolerance, respect and inclusion,” the American ambassador said.

The Attacks Continue, Investigations Begin

The swift reaction by the Lithuanian public and from abroad and the pre-trial investigation launched by the Vilnius District prosecutor over possible incitement to hate based on ethnicity didn’t cool Žemaitaitis down. In mid-June as Lithuania marked the Day of Mourning and Hope commemorating the Soviet government’s deportation of people from Lithuania to Siberia and Central Asia, the MP again attacked Jews, accusing Jews of having carried out a Holocaust of ethnic Lithuanians.

Following his many statements, the board of directors of the Lithuanian Jewish Community which represents 32 different organizations presented their position:

The Lithuanian Jewish Community is saddened by the recent anti-Semitic statements and posts made by member of the Lithuanian parliament Remigijus Žemaitaitis in some of the media, social networks and even at the Lithuanian parliament itself.

It must be said that these sorts of expressions haven’t appeared in Lithuania in a very long time, and that the Jews who live in Lithuania, 80 years after the liquidation of the Vilnius ghetto, had hoped there would be no more such expressions. All the more so as the war continues in Ukraine and people who comprise an ethnic minority can be used by the aggressor as a tool for inciting social conflict and dividing society.

The Lithuanian Jewish Community believes this act by the member of parliament intentionally sows ethnic discord and is a distortion of historical memory as well as a continuation of the “Protocols of the Elders of Zion” promulgated by the security service of the Russian tsar over a century ago.

We feel ashamed of the county in which we live and which we love and respect. Its citizens cannot elect to parliament a member who can allow himself to descend to making the following statements:

“HOW MUCH LONGER WILL OUR POLITICIANS KNEEL DOWN TO THE JEWS WHO KILLED OUR PEOPLE AND CONTRIBUTED TO THE OPPRESSION AND TORTURE OF LITHUANIANS, AND THE DESTRUCTION OF OUR COUNTRY. There was the HOLOCAUST OF THE JEWS, but there was an even LARGER HOLOCAUST OF THE LITHUANIANS IN LITHUANIA! So if our joker politicians apologize to the Jews in Israel, when will the JEWS APOLOGIZE TO US?”

The Lithuanian Office of Prosecutor General has begun an investigation into the anti-Semitic statements member of the Lithuanian parliament Remigijus Žemaitaitis has made on facebook. All of Lithuania’s highest-ranking politicians have condemned his statements, including president Gitanas Nausėda, prime minister Ingrida Šimonytė and speaker of parliament Viktorija Čmilytė-Nielsen.

Even so, this wave of anti-Semitic rhetoric makes members of the Lithuanian Jewish Community uncomfortable to say the least, and actually makes us feel degraded and unsafe. If the Lithuanian MP continues this activity and convokes followers to himself, the Jews of Lithuania will definitely feel unsafe in their home country, in a democratic state in Europe.

Although the European Union has adopted a strategy for reviving Jewish life in Eu-

rope and the Convention for the Protection of National Minorities is in effect in the EU at a fundamental level, it remains up to the member-state to determine how to implement these policies and laws, and how to safeguard the dignity of peoples who have lived for millennia in Lithuania, and it’s up to the member-state to decide how to disperse the feeling of insecurity and to protect against the painful memories of the tragic losses of the Holocaust.

The Lithuanian Jewish Community expects the state to undertake active measures to put a stop to anti-Semitic expressions and actions of all forms in Lithuania.

Incidentally, the propaganda machine of the Russian Federation has already latched onto this situation and has found a way to exploit it for its own uses, under the headline “Russian Media Releases Declassified Documents on the Holocaust” and similar:

Russian Media Releases Declassified Documents on the Holocaust

Russia has released new documents claiming that Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania were highly involved in the murder of Jews during the Holocaust.

Was that the whole point all along?



Remigijus Žemaitaitis on the Lithuanian state television program Day’s Topic, courtesy LRT

Arkadijus Vinokuras: “Scandal Intended to Discredit Lithuania”

Lithuania’s heads of state also condemned the MP’s statements.

The European Jewish Congress expressed their support to the Lithuanian Jewish Community and reported their members were “horrified by the statements the Lithuanian parliamentarian has made recently accusing Jews of the deportation and mass murder of Lithuanians. We stand in firm solidarity with the Lithuanian Jewish Community and we also condemn severely parliamentarian Žemaitaitis’s anti-Semitic comments,” the EJC wrote in a press release.

The Association of Lithuanian Jews in Israel was also concerned by the recent anti-Semitic remarks and sent an open letter to Lithuania’s ambassador to Israel Lina Antanavičienė:

„We are shocked over the recent rise of anti-Semitism in Lithuania. It is unimaginable and unacceptable that 82 after the beginning of the Holocaust and the almost total extermination of all Jews in Lithuania hate-filled rhetoric continues to thrive and is tolerated. We Litvaks cannot stand by silently because our lives are in danger.” Association of Lithuanian Jews in Israel chair-



Arie Ben-Ari Grodzensky / LJC photo

man Arie Ben-Ari Grodzensky wrote in the letter to the Lithuanian ambassador to Israel, requesting to be informed of Lithuania’s official position on the issue.

Writer Arkadijus Vinokuras saw a very sinister motive rather than naïveté in Žemaitaitis’s texts:

“But when a member of parliament says almost the exact same thing about Jews and Lithuania, no one stops him, on the contrary, his mixture of truth and lies called the ‘Holocaust of Lithuanians’ is presented a media forum.

“Remember the universal anger writer Rūta Vanagaitė’s historically inaccurate statement about [the Lithuanian partisan] Adolfas Ramanauskas-Vanagas caused? Each and every ultra-patriot mustered, it almost became a repeat of the burning of books by Jewish authors in Germany in 1933, but the Lithuanian version of that. The Lithuanian MP even copy/pasted Vytautas Tomkus’s anti-Semitic propaganda ‘Jews and Gays Rule the World’ but there was no public anger over that.

“There was no anger, although even to a stupid person it should be clear that this scandal he did cause is aimed at discrediting Lithuania in the run-up to the NATO summit meeting in Vilnius. The goal is to show how anti-Semitic, fascist and Lithuania is, and to show himself as that fifth column, Lithuania’s conscience, struggling for peace in Ukraine. That “peace” corresponds to the narrative of the Putin regime is passed over silently.

“So the question for the prosecutor’s office and the Lithuanian parliament is, in the words of Algimantas Šindeikis: ‘The question remains unanswered, why hasn’t the prosecutor general until now not presented the parliamentary leadership with a request to annul Remigijus Žemaitaitis’s parliamentary immunity and allow questions to be given him regarding the incitement of ethnic hatred against the Jewish people? (It was reported a pre-trial investigation had been launched). Reluctance to see what has been posted could be interpreted as tacit approval. It isn’t possible the prosecutors haven’t read the decision of the European Court of Human Rights and haven’t taken pictures of comments by Remigijus Žemaitaitis’s friends on facebook where domestic anti-Semitism, still hiding in the dark souls of some of us, has been exalted by producer Žemaitaitis and some of his friends to the parliamentary level. Neither do I think anyone at the prosecutor’s office are confused regarding article 62 of the Lithuanian constitution which forbids prosecuting any member of parliament for their votes and speeches in parliament. A facebook profile isn’t parliament.’

„With the aim of positioning himself politically, Remigijus Žemaitaitis chose the role of anti-Semite because he knows that that part of the citizenry who constantly hate democratic Lithuania also approve of anti-Semitism. Listening to his pseudo-historical rantings it’s easy to compare them with Putin’s imaginary ‘historical’ speculations.

Remigijus Žemaitaitis and his entire circle are well-known for kissing up to Russia. By the way, I wonder who is making this cocktail of lies and truth for Žemaitaitis with the percentage of lies at around 80%.

It’s obvious Remigijus Žemaitaitis’s knowledge of history is just as ‘deep’ as his knowledge of pig farming, but from his statements it looks like Vidmantas Valiušaitis is whispering the answers into his ear, and he names Valiušaitis specifically in his statements.

Vidmantas Valiušaitis might want to distance himself from Remigijus Žemaitaitis and his imaginary narrative of a ‘holocaust of the Lithuanians.’

„Does the member of parliament consider absolutely everybody stupid, or is he only talking to stupid people? In the case of the Jews of Lithuania, about 195,000 Jews were murdered (95% of all Lithuanian Jews) with about 256 mass murder sites appearing throughout Lithuania. A question for a fourth-grader: how many pits would that make if 95% of Lithuania’s current population of around 2.5 million were murdered?

If mass murder on that scale had been carried out Lithuania would have a post-war population of about 120,000 Lithuanians and the country would be littered with Lithuanian mass graves.

“This MP’s speech is complete ignorance of historical facts and common sense. In choosing their new public figure as their figure, Hitler’s maxim likely applies: ‘If you want the sympathy of the mob, tell them the most foolish, naïve things.’ For those who have oppressed by life, similar slogans such as ‘one Jew is guilty so all Jews are guilty’ are met with applause. But just try to say the same thing about Lithuanians, ‘one Lithuanian is guilty so all Lithuanians are guilty,’ and the patriots will stand up ready for a fight.

“I see no need to deconstruct the odious statements by the member of parliament regarding especially awful Lithuanians... Oops, sorry, I mean about especially awful Jews. Our historians who have shown a civic-minded position should take that up. Attorneys using legal arguments should defeat the argumentation by the MP who has a law degree, and so demonstrate their civic-mindedness.

“And the Church of Lithuania shouldn’t forget either and should actively remind believers of the Nostra Aetate declaration adopted by Vatican II in 1965 on the Church’s relationship with non-Christian religions: ‘...what happened in His passion cannot be charged against all the Jews, without distinction, then alive, nor against the Jews of today. ... the Jews should not be presented as rejected or accursed by God, as if this followed from the Holy Scriptures. ... Furthermore, in her rejection of every persecution against any man, the Church, mindful of the patrimony she shares with the Jews and moved not by political reasons but by the Gospel’s spiritual love, decries hatred, persecutions, displays of anti-Semitism, directed against Jews at any time and by anyone.”

Anti-Semitism Hasn't Disappeared, It Just Changed Form

by Karolis Vyšniauskas

I've investigated the topic of anti-Semitism in Lithuania as a journalist over the last few months. As my investigation went on, the topic began to appear more urgent than it had at first.



Karolis Vysniauskas / photo by Thu K. Dao



Amit Goldman / photo by Karolis Vyšniauskas

In mid-April when I spoke with Lithuanian Jewish Community executive board member and medical professional Amit Goldman on the NARA podcast, she said she was monitoring whether the anti-Semitism card would be played to sow public discord against the backdrop of the war in the Ukraine.

"The president of Russia said he was going to den-Nazify Ukraine, which has a Jewish president. I'm very concerned with whether [similar arguments] will be used to spark ethnic discord in Lithuania," she said then.

In late May her prediction came true: Lithuanian member of parliament Remigijus Žemaitaitis undertook a campaign of posting anti-Semitic texts on facebook, then continued his campaign at the Delfi.lt website which agreed to publish his statements.

Initially he pretended to care about the Palestinians, but quickly moved on to repeat a lie used by the Nazis during World War II that the Jews had organized the deportations of Lithuanians. As cultural historian Violeta Davoliūtė pointed out in an interview on the manoteises.lt web page in 2016, the first Soviet deportations from Lithuania were especially multiethnic with ethnic Lithuanians, Poles, Jews and Russians targeted. It was only later that the deportations were Lithuanianized in the national narrative.

Žemaitaitis's tactics recall the desire Donald Trump and other recent politicians have for getting attention by saying shocking things and shifting the so-called Overton window, gradually infiltrating the public discourse with ideas which had been beyond the pale previously. This is a joke, presenting the public with a lose-lose situation. If you ignore it, you risk making this sort of speech acceptable. If you oppose it, you give a given politician even more attention.

It's important to note MP Žemaitaitis never seemed to care about this topic earlier. Until May of 2023, google finds no results for Žemaitaitis plus Palestine, Žemaitaitis and Israel or Žemaitaitis and Jews. The member of parliament seems to have simply decided to blow new air into the anti-Semitism latent in a portion of the population, thus negating the growing friendship between ethnic Lithuanians and Litvaks. A friendship which Amit has been watching.

"I know there are people who see Lithuania as a land seeped in blood and who will never travel here. But now the perspective has changed. Lithuanian Jews have become interesting to the people of Lithuania," Amit said in the podcast interview.

She also remembers how when she and a group of friends visited a bar in Vilnius recently, the barkeeper greeted the group with an enthusiastic "Shalom!" She compared that with what happened 15 years ago, when she and a girlfriend were walking down Gediminas prospect, Vilnius's main street, and a skinhead spit on them. It might seem Jews are safer now in Lithuania than ever before. Nonetheless, Amit remains vigilant. "It's always harder to identify a force which changes shape. Which you wouldn't recognize on the street. I can't say people with anti-Semitic views have disappeared. They are among us, they just no longer speak so loudly because they understand political correctness is an important thing," Amit said in the podcast from NARA working jointly with the Lithuanian Human Rights Center.

One no longer hears the chant "Lithuania for Lithuanians" during March 11 Independence Day marches, but ideas about erasing the identity of Lithuanian Jews have their representatives in the political parties. This year for the first time the Nacionalinio susivienijimo partija, the National Unification Party, was elected to the Vilnius city council, a party which seeks to defend historical figures such as Juozas Krištaponis, a known perpetrator of Holocaust crimes in Belarus who has a statue in his honor in Ukmergė, Lithuania, and Lithuanian Activist Front founder Kazys Skirpa whose vision was a Lithuania free of Jews standing in solidarity with Nazi Germany: "Let's liberate Lithuania from the Jewish yoke forever."

Even so, Amit has chosen the path of openness and shared values in her Jewish activism in Lithuania. "We should be more sensitive to one another in Lithuania. It doesn't matter if you're a Jew or not," she said. You can hear the whole interview with Amit Goldman in Lithuanian by following the QR code below:



Josifas Parasonis and wife / photo by Karolis Vyšniauskas

Another encounter regarding the theme of Lithuanian Jews occurred with professor Josifas Parasonis who was born in Kaunas in February, 1941. Four months later more than 50 Lithuanian Jews were brutally murdered publicly after being tortured and made object of public derision at the Lietūkis garage in Kaunas. Professor Parasonis suspects his father might have been among the victims. His father was murdered in the Holocaust and he only saw him for the first few months after he was born. He grew up without him. He and his mother returned to Lithuania after the war ended. They fled death by boarding a train to the Soviet Union. Parasonis is one of the most authoritative construction experts in Lithuania and served as head of the Architectural Engineering Cathedral at Vilnius Gediminas Technical University.

"Time heals," professor Parasonis said, reflecting on his life story when we met at his home in Vilnius. He's noticed great progress in Lithuanian society regarding the issue of their Jewish fellow citizens. "In the first publications, articles and discussions in newly independent Lithuania, many authors used the words 'Jews in Lithuania.' And only later—and I consider this great progress—did they move to a different formulation: 'Jews of Lithuania.' This shows we have evolved," professor Parasonis said in a video documentary.

"On the other hand," he added, "although many writing on this topic recognize, of course, that the Holocaust happened, when they talk about the participation of Lithuanians, about their actions during that time, even if the facts are recognized, they still keep trying to present them with excuses and exceptions. They look for reasons which justify these actions. To my way of thinking, there is no justification for what happened."

During the interview the academic noted that despite the greater visibility of Jews in Lithuania now, we still haven't had a Jewish minister, much less a Jewish president. There were no Jewish ministers in Soviet Lithuania, either. This contradicts the stereotype that Jews were influential in the Communist power structure. "In the first independent Lithuania [1918–1940] there was a Jewish minister, the minister of Jewish affairs. But there was that at least," the professor said.

"Europe's Worrying Surge of Anti-Semitism" was the headline Human Rights Watch ran in 2021, referring to anti-Semitic attacks in Austria, Germany and the United Kingdom. Some of these attacks were allegedly connected with pro-Palestinian movements in Europe. Human Rights Watch stressed violations of human rights by the state of Israel cannot be used as an excuse for hate against Jews throughout the world. When there is discussion of whether criticism of actions by the state of Israel is in itself anti-Semitism, it's immediately clear that a considerable portion of influential Jewish thinkers, including Samuel Bak who was rescued from the Vilnius ghetto and is a painter living in the United States now, also criticize the actions of the Israeli government. We spoke about that with the artist in an earlier NARA podcast.

In October of 2021 the European Commission presented the first "European Union Strategy on Combating Anti-Semitism and Fostering Jewish Life." "Taking into consideration the concerning rise of anti-Semitism in Europe and beyond her borders, the Strategy foresees targeted actions across three pillars, and seeks to place the EU firmly in the lead of the global fight against anti-Semitism, complementing measures within the EU with international efforts along all the three pillars," the European Commission said in a press release.

In April of this year UNESCO and the European Commission began an education project in 12 countries in Europe (Lithuania not being among them) to talk about the problems posed by anti-Semitism. UNESCO researchers found that about one in eight posts about the Holocaust on social media falsified history. On the Telegram platform it was one out of two.

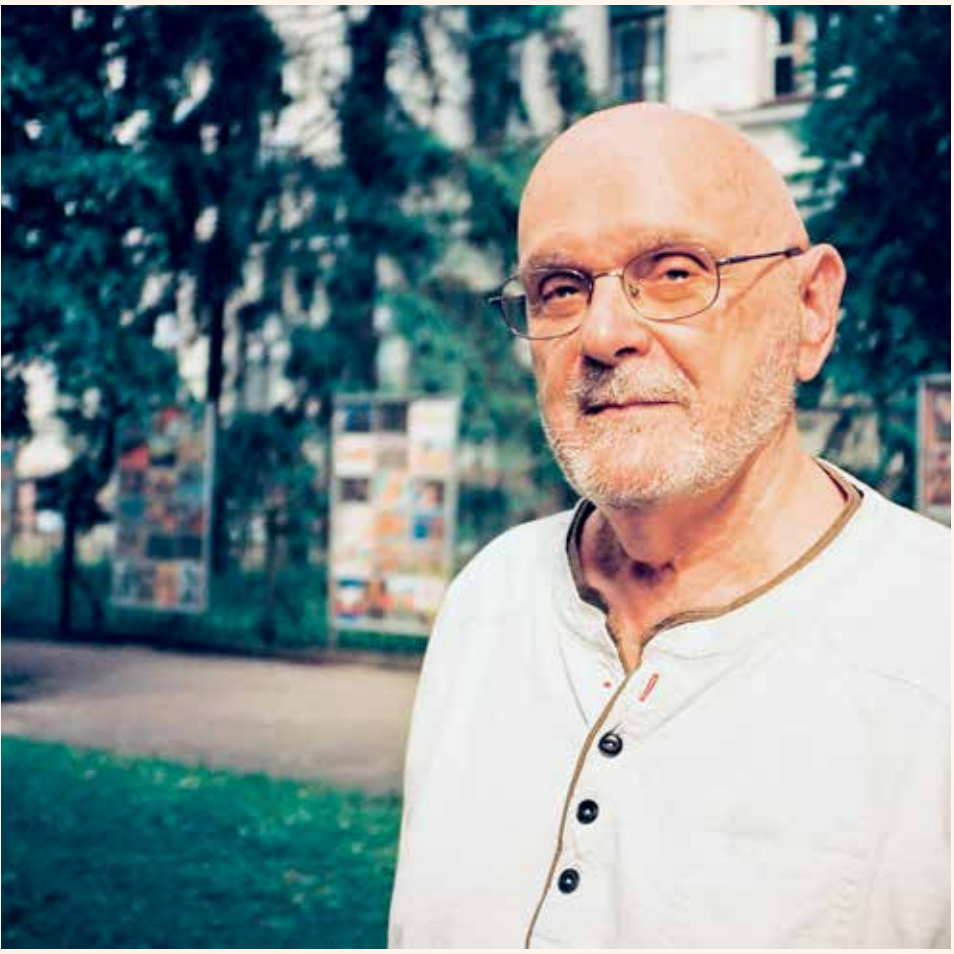
The word "anti-Semitism" is associated with the name of one member of parliament in Lithuania these last several weeks. But the topic is much larger than that and will remain a problem even after the current scandal is forgotten.



Watch a video portrait of professor Parasonis by videographer Mindaugas Drigotas:



video portrait of professor Parasonis / by videographer Mindaugas Drigotas



Prof. Saulius Sužiedėlis / LJC photo

An Interview with Professor Saulius Sužiedėlis: Marginalizing Hate is the Cure for Anti-Semitism

Saulius Sužiedėlis, professor emeritus of Millersville University in Pennsylvania, has spent much of his career researching the Holocaust and the factors behind the Holocaust in Lithuania, and in teaching the public about his results. He of course couldn't miss seeing the wave of anti-Semitism washing over our country recently which has given courage to aggressive radicals to emerge from the shadows who use democratic values and freedom of speech as cover. We spoke with the Holocaust researcher about the origins of this latest wave of hate and ways to oppose it.

Q. What do think are the reasons for this wave of anti-Semitism?

A. I don't follow Lithuania's political life very closely, but I do notice these kinds of anti-Semitic statements. And foreign countries notice as well. It should be said frankly that these kinds of anti-Semitic discourses are harmful both ethically and morally, but also harm the state and its image. Especially nowadays there's no need to explain to people why this has a special importance.

On the other hand, this is a global phenomenon which we see outside Lithuania as well. I think it's related in general to increased radicalism in society.

I have to say I haven't read these kinds of impassioned, hate-filled statements in a good decade now. They wouldn't be so dangerous if there wasn't a market for them.

Follow the family marches [pro-heterosexual marches for family values held on an annual basis in Lithuania] and all sorts of protests, a political market for these statements and narratives appears, to which figures in power or seeking power turn. Sensing there a mass of gullible people has formed who suffer economic hardships and unemployment and who are frightened by immigration, these public figures start to manipulate, seeking basic gain. That's how people such as [MP Remigijus] Žemaitaitis show up.

Of course anti-Semitism is nothing new in Lithuania. It was, it is now and it will live on for some time. There are many reasons for it, and especially among the older generation have entrenched stereotypes of Jews as exploiters and scam artists.

Let's remember that in 1941 Jews became not just competitors or political opponents—long before the Germans arrived the story circulating widely was that the Jews were the enemy, traitors to the Lithuanian state. At first this just consisted of rumors and hints, but it soon grew into a specific ideology: the Jews were responsible for Bolshevism, and they would never change. The image of the Jewish Bolshevik took firm root in the subconscious and went on into public circulation, it became the official narrative. If we view the Lithuanian Activist Front as an organization which proclaimed it was in charge of the country and the liberation of the country, then this narrative became semi-official, which it never was during the era of president Smetona. That was a huge

► 8 p.

An Interview with Professor Saulius Sužiedėlis: Marginalizing Hate is the Cure for Anti-Semitism

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shift which also survived into the post-war period. Sadly, it appears that in the 1970s the roots of these old stereotypes, superstitions and hate sent up shoots in the dissident movement.

Despite that, I have noticed that the younger generations is much more open to Jewish history than the older generation, they accept the history of the Holocaust with all its uncomfortable aspects more readily.

Q. In his statements Remigijus Žemaitaitis claims he has historical knowledge, he names the names of Jews he claims were party to the deportation of Lithuanians, he juggles biographical facts taken out of context of different people and declassified documents from Russia's intelligence services. This seems to be sufficient for his followers.

A. Historians need to speak to this, or better still a group of historians, so people might hear and understand the general context of events.

The parliamentarian's statements about the Pirčiupis village tragedy shocked me the most, he alleged the Jews were guilty people were burned alive there. This is not normal. We know that tragedy was complex. I myself not very long ago drove by the memorial there, stopped and read the information stand which said the partisans shot several Germans and the Germans took revenge by burning down this village, so the guilt accrues to them. In other venues the idea is pushed that this was done intentionally. Whatever the case, it wasn't the Jews or the Soviets who put Pirčiupis to the torch, it was the Germans, and that's plain as day. To tell people otherwise is a shameless manipulation.

Žemaitaitis's other statements are a repetition of the same old superstitions which have been handed down from olden times: accusations about the first Bolshevik period [in Lithuania] where allegedly 90% of the Communists were Jews. This is clearly false.

I studied the first Soviet period [in Lithuania]. Nijolė Maslauskienė and Liudas Truska have written hundreds of pages about this. There are statistics, if rather confused and complicated. If you just take one piece from them you can prove anything you want. You can show Lithuanians were in charge of the Lithuanian Communist Party because two thirds of ordinary party members were, of course, Lithuanians. But it's not true.

You can try to show Jews ruled the Communist Party because in the summer of 1940 there was a very short period when Jews accounted for 60% of members at the main administration center of the Lithuanian Communist Party in Kaunas. This, of course, changed very quickly, and several months later, towards the end of the year, Russian speakers arrived from Soviet Union and took everything over. They then constituted 50% of ordinary party members and party leaders. And this statistic held good right up to 1950.

People who seek to manipulate ignore the fact this was an ever-changing process. They try to explain many things based on cherry-picked sources, attempting to use them as a foundation for a preconceived stance.

Of course no honest historian operates this way because there is a context which has to be understood, for example, the fact the vast majority of the Jewish communi-

ty consisted of religious people, and there were only a handful of Communists. There were several thousand in the underground and another 600 were released from prison. That's in a population of 3 million people. So what are we talking about, trying to place the guilt on an entire ethnicity, that somehow the Jews betrayed the country? After all, Lithuanians also had Jewish fellow citizens, some of whom went to war for Lithuania from 1918 to 1920, who were totally loyal to the state, and to president Smetona as well.

Q. All conspiracy theories seem to include Jews, if not directly, then on the margins. Why is this?

A. After two millennia of anti-Semitism it's doubtful any historian could answer this question. This is some deeply-held inner darkness, superstitions which won't let a person think soberly.

It was easier to explain in earlier times. For the simple Lithuanians of the 19th and early 20th centuries, the main factor was that Jews weren't Christians, in other words, they weren't fully-fledged human beings. Peasants felt if you didn't work the land but made your living through trade, you were suspicious.

Racial anti-Semitism only sent forth shoots in Lithuania in the 1930s, the idea developing that the Jewish problem wasn't economic or political, but one of race. They aren't like Europeans, having come from the Middle East or Africa. But we are Europeans, Aryans in a certain sense. So there was a separation, and when you corner a person, he can't change right away, accept baptism and become good. He will remain what he was before.

Conspiracy theories also spread their spider webs over political life with the idea Jews were a global force (because they were everywhere) who control us. Following World War I, and especially in Germany, there was this idea, look how many Jews are professors, merchants and politicians, as a percentage higher than other people. That means they are in charge of something behind the scenes.

This narrative doesn't fade away quickly because there are always new occasions to return to it. I believe, however, that the younger generation and the good influence emanating from the West can put a stop somewhat to this darkness. We now that officially, in museums and universities, things are going pretty well. There are Lithuanian researchers who read Yiddish and Hebrew and who have become involved in researching Jewish culture.

That wasn't the case before. During the period of independence [1918–1940] Augustinas Janulaitis was the only author who wrote a brief history of the Jews of Lithuania called “Žydai Lietuvoje: bruožai iš Lietuvos visuomenės istorijos XIV–XIX amž.” [The Jews in Lithuania: Features from the History of Lithuanian Society from the 14th to 19th Centuries]. In his book he expressed the hope more historians would take an interest in the history of the Jews as Lithuanian residents and fellow citizens. No one at that time took up his proposal.

Now it's different. We're talking about the cultural elite, of course. What is happening at the bottom of society is very concerning. You only have to listen to what people on the streets say and you get the shivers. Even so, I believe that in general the situations is better than it was thirty years ago. And then here we have this member of parliament,

not some simple country boy, but a parliamentarian who allows himself to incite hate.

Q. How do we fight them effectively without descending to his level and that of authors of similar statements?

A. We have to try to marginalize them, to isolate them socially and politically so that people who say such things will feel uncomfortable, ill at ease, and will themselves avoid entering this kind of situation again.

Of course we need the backbone of the political elite here who would speak out, no matter how useless that might be politically. Yes, there were such statements, but not enough.

Q. Most anti-Semitic attacks take place using democracy and freedom of speech as cover. The USA where you live and work is the oldest democracy in the world. How do they set the boundaries which must not be transgressed there?

A. These boundaries are set in the United States for now because the president and most important leaders and the academic elite have spoken out rather severely for these boundaries.

Unfortunately we have on presidential candidate who doesn't avoid making radical statements. I mean Donald Trump, of course.

There is a radical wing among his base. As the poet Sigitas Geda once said, there are more stupid people in a big country. So if there are 10,000 radicals in Lithuania, in America there are 10,000,000. Since a clear leader has appeared, they are emboldened to express themselves publicly, they are no longer afraid and hiding in the shadows, and the media covers them, so the state now has a difficult time fighting against this. So the biggest danger is that now in saying their horrible things the radicals in America no longer feel discomfort.

The claim Trump can't be an anti-Semite because his son-in-law Jared Kushner is Jewish with Litvak roots and his daughter converted to Judaism doesn't mean anything. This is simply an attempt to avoid responsibility, even though everything clearly shows the people are being set against one another intentionally.

In such cases each and every person who has contributed to the spread of anti-Semitic ideas must accept responsibility.

There are also examples of this in Lithuania, for instance, Domantas Sabonis's conversion to Judaism.

When you read the comments under the articles on the internet news sites, it becomes scary. Maybe there is a certain percentage of professional trolls posting there, but many of the statements are authentic and that forces us to think.

I think one of the ways to put a stop to radicalism is for the internet sites simply not to publish these kinds of comments. If the commentators want to post these sorts of ideas, they can write them somewhere else, on platforms which are clearly radical.

Because freedom of speech isn't absolute. Even in America it's not absolute. Certain limits have to exist and recent events or even the times could become the occasion for drawing these boundaries or reconsidering them.

Everybody can do this themselves. I have acquaintances, let's say, who are domestic anti-Semites, they tell somewhat distasteful jokes about Jews in a group setting or at the bar, and say there is too much talk about Jewish rights. Sometimes I tolerate them because I know that they are good

people. We talk, I explain, they think about it. But statements such as those made by Žemaitaitis are examples of what can no longer be tolerates.

I have the exact same kind of boundaries in discussions about violence or Russia's war against the Ukraine. People who support the war I simply unfriend.

The idea that all opinions have the right to exist, while it might be a nice thought, contains a big danger which gradually, unnoticed, erases those red lines which separate good from evil.

Q. Is apathy, the desire not to get involved, another danger?

A. This is one of the main reasons why these things happen. One German after the war once said: “Ten people are sitting down at a table, one of them is a Nazi. If the nine others don't oppose him, that means there are ten Nazis sitting at the table.” That might be overstating it, but the idea is very true, because the most horrific events in the world and also in Lithuania happened as others looked on silently, not wanting to get involved.

Q. History is the constant repetition on lessons unlearned. More than eighty years have now passed since one of the world's greatest tragedies, the Holocaust. Do recent events show we are about to repeat that same mistake?

A. I don't believe that events such as the Holocaust could recur in an authentically democratic country if they aren't at war or involved in domestic conflicts. But if that democratic environment were to disappear, then really anything could happen. Let's take the simplest example: over 40 million refugees flee from the South to the North due to climate change, drought and famine. Where should they go? Of course they will where they see safety and a better life. So then there is the fear they will attack us, we will disappear, and some people can exploit this fear.

Anti-Semitism is a necessary precondition but not a sufficient reason for the tragic events of the Holocaust to repeat themselves. Neither are the other “-isms,” hate or street fights. Genocide didn't begin in Germany in 1933, after all. It need several other prerequisite political conditions which provides the environment for it to take place: Hitler's ideology, the war, a decision by the regime and coordination actions.

Each and every one of us is responsible for insuring this never happens again. Not accepting any expressions of hate, not keeping silent, the marginalization of hate—all of these are the cure for anti-Semitism.

Q. You have spoken at length with teachers in Lithuania who are raising the next generation. What are your insights, what awaits our society in the future?

A. Actually I have communicated with teachers for more than twenty years now in various seminars. I have to say the situation is changing for the better.

This year the TOLI seminar held in Vilnius by the Olga Lengyel Institute for Holocaust Studies and Human Rights based in New York and secretariat of Lithuania's International Commission for Assessing the Crimes of the Nazi and Soviet Occupational Regimes in Lithuania had the very best group of teachers I can remember ever. Bright, eager to learn guides of youth who are changing Lithuania, raising people who respect others. It makes me optimistic.

Star Jones of US Commission for the Preservation of America's Heritage Abroad Visits Lithuanian Jewish Community



Starlet „Star“ Jones Lugo and Dovilė Rukaitė / photo by Vytas Naviera

[In April The Lithuanian Jewish Community received a special guest: Starlet “Star” Jones Lugo, appointed by U.S. president Biden to head the U.S. Commission for the Preservation of America's Heritage Abroad. Among her other important meetings she found time to visit to the Bagel Shop Café where she talked with us about heritage, culture and history. Interviewed by Dovilė Rukaitė.](#)

The Bagel Shop Café opened at the Lithuanian Jewish Community in Vilnius in 2016 and appears to have recovered from the COVID closures. Always a place for cultures to meet, the Bagel Shop Café was true to its name and re-introduced real Jewish bagels to Lithuania, as well as many other traditional Jewish and Litvak foods and snacks.

Q.: It is highly symbolic we're conducting this interview with you here, where real bagels were re-introduced in Lithuania after so many years as one of the signature features of Litvak culture.

A.: So I assumed that the Bagel Shop was designed to be a gathering place, exactly as a place to come and share ideas, bounce things off each other and be a community, and fostering Jewish life in one space.

I absolutely agree with its description as a synagogue for secular people. This is where the whole community gathers. As a Christian we always say we'd like to bring Christ into culture. So you just bring Christian values into situations that other people can enjoy, secular people can enjoy. Same thing here. The Bagel Shop should do the same thing. Yes, it should bring Jewish values and cul-

ture and tradition into a place where others can enjoy and be a part of it and included, so I get it immediately.

Q.: What's your mission here in Lithuania today, and how long are you staying?

A.: It's actually that my mission is the Commission. I always like to tell people that we have the longest name of any United States agency, the smallest budget, but the biggest purpose. And so it's a little bit of a dichotomy.

Our mission is to bring culture and heritage back to the countries that were so gracious and sending us their immigrants. Immigration into the United States is really what makes the United States *the* United States. Our foundation, if you will, is built on the shared values, wants, needs and desires of the immigrants who came. The Commission was put in place so that we can remember those immigrant families who were lost during the tragedy of World War II.

Q.: If you fail to remember, then you're destined to repeat previous mistakes.

A.: And we see that around the world constantly. So I love the mission of our Commission. And the purpose is to put in context the atrocities of WWII and the aftermath, and how it impacted people's lives. Therefore, that's the overall 30,000-foot mission of the Commission. My presence in Lithuanian, however, is literally that it was one of the first places that I was introduced to as the new chairperson. For practical purposes: some of the largest atrocities started here in Lithuania. Therefore if you want to memorialize and commemorate the lives lost, you can do that at the place where it kind of started, unfortunately.

I have been impressed with a couple of things. First of all, the Lithuanian government seems to be a true partner with the United States government in acknowledging the atrocities.

Also, we commemorate the victims and memorialize them. We celebrate the heroes, those people who stepped outside of their comfort zone and were there for neighbors at great risk for themselves.

And I think that's something that the Commission does very well, we find partners in different industries to not take on what is referred to as a quote “Jewish issue,” when it's really a “humanity issue.” And the more you think of it as a humanity issue, the more collaboration we have. So that's why I'm in Lithuania. This is an example of how that occurs.

And I told you there were two things that I was impressed with. Besides the government cooperation, the second thing is the activity of the Jewish community here in Lithuania. The Goodwill Foundation has just been doing great work on the ground. And to have a valued partner with that foundation is fantastic. I mean, obviously, I've worked with your leaders from the moment I became chairperson.

Q.: Have our politicians heard your presentation of your memory and cultural heritage concept?

A.: One of the things that I love about my role as chair is that I get to be non-political. The Commission for the preservation of America's Heritage Abroad is, as we call it, low-hanging fruit. And low-hanging fruit in the United States means fruit that can easily be picked. Memorializing and commemorating the lives lost and treating peo-

ple as human beings and their relationship to their cultural heritage—that should be easy to pick! That should be easy to make inclusive in your heart, that should be easy as a conversation. So it's really my job to communicate that to your political base, that this is not a difficult thing. It shouldn't have to be difficult. It's made difficult by politics, but it should not have to be difficult. And it starts with, quite frankly, acknowledging what has occurred and learning from that historical reference. So I've communicated that to everyone that I've met and it will be the sort of the refrain I use as I take this wonderful approach. But do they listen?

Actually I think, the meeting today with the prime minister really was a little bit eye-opening. My background is so very different and rich. I have worked in the law, in business and in media, but also in philanthropy. I spend a lot of my time in all of those areas. But the unifying sort of thread that goes through all of them are my efforts at diversity, equity and inclusion, inclusiveness around the table of conversation. And so when I got to share today earlier, this concept of acknowledgment is important.

And there's a conflict about whom to honor whom not to honor. But acknowledging history does not put you in that position. You don't have to make a decision on honoring, but simply acknowledging the historical place that person or entity or instance happened. The facts are the facts. People get to make their own conclusions. But we in society should make the informa-

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Why the Holocaust Affected Men and Women Differently

An interview with psychologist **Ruth Reches**



Ruth Reches / LIC photo

June 21, 2023

Millions of people were murdered in the Holocaust and the trauma it caused has left deep wounds in survivors, but also in their descendants. Researchers more or less agree Holocaust trauma is different than other kinds of trauma. How exactly? What did those people who came back from the ghettos and concentration camps to society experience? How has the Holocaust affected later generations?

The human rights website manoteises.lt is publishing a five-part series about this topic in which doctor of psychology and principal

of the Sholem Aleichem Gymnasium in Vilnius Ruth Reches attempts to answer these questions.

In the first part, Reches characterizes the Holocaust and other types of traumatic experiences. In the second, she talks about how Holocaust trauma led to shifts and transformations in personal identity. In the third, how the Holocaust affected the children of survivors. In this, the fourth section, Reches talks about the way the Holocaust affected men and women differently.

As she was writing her dissertation on Holocaust trauma, Reches interviewed Holo-

caust survivors. Goda Rasčiūtė corresponded with Reches about her research.

During the Holocaust mothers took on the role of person responsible for the safety of children. Mothers saw their relationship with the Holocaust by the nature of the danger to their children. They sacrificed their own welfare and health for the children's safety. Mothers strived to change the environment into a less-hostile one by satisfying the basic needs of the children and focusing on domestic matters. This provided them and the children the image of a controlled situation. In the Holocaust, safe bonding was crucially important for children's development of identity: informants in the research who had lost most of their family members sought to remain members of the family, to belong to the family and feel loved and needed.

The Holocaust changed the image of the father. Because the men were shot first, in most cases the father disappeared from his children's lives at the very start of the war and the mothers had to take on all the work they had done before. In other cases fathers did remain with children but lost physical and psychological health, so the image of the strong father, the head of the household, declined in the eyes of the children and, instead of providing a sense of security to children, he became the object of their sympathy, pity and condolences.

Researchers have provided several reasons why the men (in this case the fathers) had a harder time surviving the Holocaust than women (mothers) did. Men saw themselves as protectors and providers. In the Holocaust when concentration camp and ghetto prisoners were treated as non-humans men felt powerless and this affected their understanding of self. The men were forced to realize it wasn't just that they had become pow-

erless, they also realized they could no longer protect their families. There are researchers who claim that the children who survived and who were with their father during the war were worse adapted than those who had been with their mother because seeing their fathers as weak creatures ruined the child's image of a powerful father figure. The image of a debased mother was not as frightening as that of an insecure father. On the other hand, there is another opinion which claims children who were with their mother during the Holocaust should have been more affected when the traumatized mother was unable to provide the child a basic sense of safety. In fact, imprisoned women were able more easily than men to form relationships with other people and that helped them survive. This is believed to be a product of genetics and evolution, the way "the weaker sex," women, received more protection and support from others than did the physically stronger and independent men.

An alternative view which also illustrated the greater fragility of men is connected with safety when survivors were in hiding. Some studies show that boys who hid with locals during the war were more at risk than girls because of the Jewish tradition of circumcision. This tradition made it easy for the Nazis to determine a person's Jewishness, so local residents wanted to help boys less than girls. Girls had more possibilities for convincing Nazis they weren't Jewish. For this reason Jewish boys in hiding during the Holocaust experienced more stress than girls did.

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Star Jones of US Commission for the Preservation of America's Heritage Abroad Visits Lithuanian Jewish Community

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tion available. And so I did, I think. They, at least for the people that I've been having a conversation with, they at least got my concept.

Q.: You had the short conversation with our younger generation, students from the Jewish school, about their hopes and dreams.

A.: It's interesting, it was varied. I had one young man who was very clear that he is into fashion and creativity, he wants to travel. He's interested in going to Milan, which is of course the seat of fashion, OK. One young man who was 16 who says he doesn't want to be hemmed in right now. He wants to explore what opportunities are there for him. A young man who actually is interested in Space X, and so science and technology was his interest. He was concerned that for national security reasons, foreigners are not able to participate. He

very much wanted me to know that. But then he was looking at whether or not dual citizenship was in his future. So I love that he brought that up. And then I got the opportunity to speak with a group of young women.

One young woman has medicine clearly in her sight, and I asked her if she was interested in the actual treating of patients versus research and science, and she's interested in research and science. The other two young women, they said they really weren't sure. And I wanted to reassure them that they had time. OK. Being young gives you the opportunity to see what the world offers, and then, just as importantly, what you can offer the world. So my conversation with the young people was one that was inspirational, you answered my question, for what they should be prepared a little bit about you as a personality, which culture you're coming from.

Q.: And what do you cook at home, if you cook? This is an unavoidable question at the Bagel Shop.

A.: I like to cook. I'm, uh, I'm actually a southerner. From the southern part of the United States. I was born in North Carolina, but I've lived all over the country. So born in North Carolina, I got all southern influences. My mother had eight sisters. We moved to New Jersey. So that's very East Coast. And I did my undergraduate school in Washington, D.C., and then my law school down in Texas. So I got the Southwest influence lately. And then after law school, I returned to the East Coast, to New York City, which is very different. Yeah. And then as my career in journalism started, I went out to California, so I got that Hollywood experience, then back to New York to really work on my journalism career. And then I fell in love. And that took me to the Midwest. And so I'm in Chicago now. And you know, what's interesting is that I'm at a phase in my life, that those wonderful Midwest values are exactly what I like. So I love my southern foundation. I'm glad to have had the East Coast experience and the LA Hollywood experience.

But now as a wife and mother, that value system really works for me. So I've really had the American experience, and I've loved every minute of it and yes, I cook and I am a very good cook. My husband will tell you fish is his favorite thing for me to cook and I make a mean sea bass.

And have known the vice-president of the United States for a very long time. We were actually sorority sisters. And we would compare what we're really good cooks at. I am the better cook at fish. She's the better cook at chicken. So, OK then...

Q.: Do you like bagels?

A.: Oh, I had a bagel yesterday. Bagel lox, bagel with salmon and cream cheese. OK, yes, definitely. That's why when I walked in, I said OK, am I gonna get a chance to have famous bagels? I like mine. I like my bagel with some cream cheese and a little lox on top of that. I wasn't sure if I had to ask for that to be specially made, but that's what I asked for. This turned out to be number one on the menu.

Litvak Influence on Lithuanian Cuisine

by **Joe Baur** | BBC korespondent

War and Soviet occupation robbed Lithuania of its unique culinary history. Fortunately, there is a growing number of chefs and cooks committed to remembering it.



Joe Bauras / BBC photo



Nida Degutienė

Imagine long strands of dill swimming in a cold, beetroot soup; soul-restoring potato dumplings with your choice of cottage cheese or meat on a freezing winter's day; fried black bread with garlic you vigorously rub onto the bread yourself. These are some of the staples of Lithuanian cuisine; hearty meat-and-potatoes fare to fill you up for the labour of the day.

They're all delicious, comforting and satisfying, but that's only scratching the surface of Lithuanian cooking. Tourists are forgiven for their ignorance since the tiny Baltic nation has yet, for better or worse, to tickle the imagination of travel and food media at large.

The tragedy of it all is: Lithuanians themselves can be just as unaware when it comes to their own culinary heritage. But there are a number of chefs committed to remembering their historical national dishes and serving it up so that future generations can continue the long process of reclaiming their cuisine.

The fact that many Lithuanians are unfamiliar with the roots of their own cuisine was not by accident. Lithuania was occupied by the Soviet Union from 1940-1990.

"It is very important to bear in mind that during the Soviet occupation, Lithuanians for nearly 50 years did not have access to their own history," explained Nida Degutienė, author of the book A Taste of Israel: From classic Litvak to modern Israeli. (Litvak refers to Jews with roots in historical Lithuania.) "Our history was rewritten by Russians. Any religion – Catholic, Jewish – was forbidden."

Degutienė explained that baptisms, church marriages and celebrating Shabbat were all forbidden during the Soviet era.

"People were hiding their identities," she said. "We knew nearly nothing about the roots of our cuisine."

Chef **Rita Keršulytė-Ryčkova** of Lokys in Vilnius puts it even more succinctly: "The internal policy of the Soviet Union, especially in the Baltic region, was to erase our identity and make us Soviet, not Lithuanian."

This meant spending more time on Russian language lessons than Lithuanian and ridding society of its intellectuals – applying the same approach to Lithuanian literature, culture, religion and gastronomy.

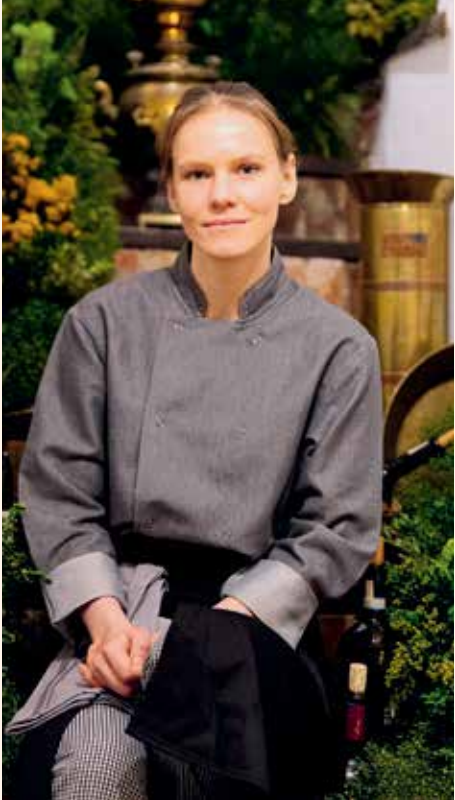
"There was a one-cuisine approach for our entire region without variation," Keršulytė-Ryčkova said. "There was a list of dishes that were made in all restaurants and cafes, and you could not do anything out of the list."

Keršulytė-Ryčkova said that a typical Soviet menu might include Chicken Kyiv (chicken fillet pounded, rolled in butter and coated with egg and breadcrumbs); shashlik (meat skewers); meatballs made from pork; goulash; and borscht.

Two or three generations of gastronomic knowledge were lost by the time Lithuania gained independence from the Soviet Union on 11 March 1990. Lithuanians had mistakenly conflated their historical cuisine with Soviet cuisine, and the knowledge of how to make traditional Lithuanian dishes was lost. But chefs like Keršulytė-Ryčkova are resurrecting it, creating menus that tell a national story many Lithuanians themselves aren't familiar with.

Keršulytė-Ryčkova explained that a Jewish-American man whose parents were Litvaks from Vilnius visited and quickly became upset after looking through the menu. Lokys promised a recreation of historical Lithuanian cuisine and he couldn't find any representation of his ancestors. Keršulytė called the interaction an eye-opening, moving experience. She admitted her mistake and promised him that the next time he came, she would have a dish on the menu that represented his history.

While not making excuses, Keršulytė-Ryčkova explained that this, too, is common in Lithuania. The guilt of the Holocaust, she surmised, is probably why. "We missed a big part of Lithuanian history, because in Lithuania, we do not talk about our Jewish community that used to live here," she explained. "We know it, but it's not a subject we touch a lot commonly." To fill the Litvak gap, she referred largely to Vilnius' own Fania Lewando, who wrote The Vilna Vegetarian, first published



R. Keršulytė-Ryčkova

in Yiddish in 1938 and rediscovered and translated into English in 2015. The kosher caterer and author championed vegetarian cuisine long before it was en vogue and climate change demanded a tougher look at our eating norms. Her work drew inspiration from Jewish values that discourage causing animals undue pain and continues to inspire a new generation of Jewish vegetarian cooks. Keršulytė-Ryčkova based her curd cheese balls in tomato sauce on a mix of recipes from Lewando's book, such as the canned tomato soup, stewed potatoes with tomatoes, Ukrainian cheese vareniks (pierogis) and cheese dumplings with breadcrumbs. The kneidlach (matzo balls) came to her from Nida Degutienė's recipe in A Taste of Israel.

Keršulytė explained that the Litvak dishes on her menu are so inextricably intertwined with non-Jewish Lithuanian culture, that they've adapted them for Christian traditions. The boletus or mushroom-stuffed dumplings are a Christmas Eve tradition. "We also eat latkes, the potato pancakes that come from Litvak heritage," she said. This blending of cuisines likely happened when Lithuanian girls would work

at Jewish tavernas and learn to cook, bringing new recipes back home with them. Keršulytė-Ryčkova said this is how cepelinai entered and became the showpiece of Lithuania's culinary canon. They're easy to make, filling and nourishing. Non-Jewish Lithuanians merely adapted it by adding pork.

Most Lithuanians would point to cepelinai as one of the staples of their cuisine along with other potato-rich dishes, like *kugelis* – oven-baked grated potatoes mixed with onions, milk, eggs, salt, pepper and bacon. But Keršulytė-Ryčkova said they're actually from Vilnius' historical Litvak community dating to the beginning of the 17th Century.

"It's a very funny thing, because if you ask any Lithuanian on the street, he will swear that it's 100% Lithuanian and that it has nothing to do with the Jewish community," she said. "But it did come from their Litvak cuisine to us."

Fortunately, Lokys isn't the only restaurant where Litvak cuisine lives on. There's **Beigelių krautuvėlė** (simply "bagel shop" in English) opened by cookbook author **Dovilė Rūkaitė** in 2016. Inside there's a counter surrounded by the various caffeine-pumping apparatuses of a coffee shop and a bakery display with bagels, *Agūninė pynė* (poppy seed rolls) and four golden *bišalybs* (like bagels but baked with a depressed centre filled with onion and poppyseeds). There were also *teiglach* (fist-sized, knotted pastries) on the counter.

Degutienė said that it took leaving Lithuania in 2009 for Israel to learn that many dishes (like latkes, challah, blintzes and honey cake) were, in fact, just as Jewish as they were Lithuanian.

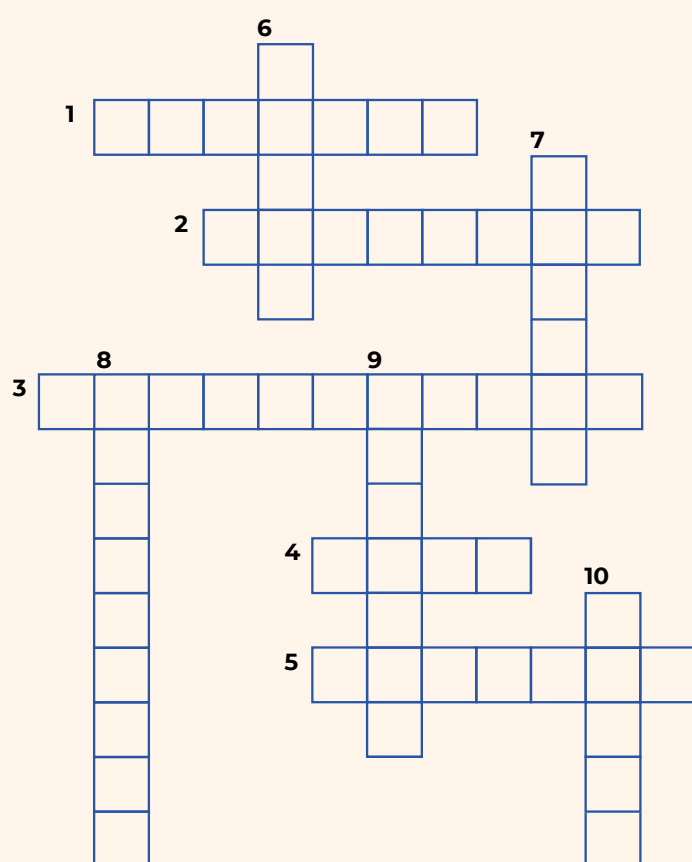
"It honestly took time for me to acknowledge that, indeed, this has been our common culinary heritage," she said. Today, she thinks of Vilnius as one of the best places in the world to eat Jewish food.

These Jewish dishes are just one piece of the Lithuanian culinary pie. At **Ertlio Namai**, chef and co-founder Tomas Rimydis focuses on recreating Medieval, Renaissance and Baroque Lithuanian cuisine, interpreted with modern sensibilities in mind. Seasonality serves as the foundation of the restaurant as he relies on what's available in the garden, what he can hunt in the woods or fish in nearby rivers and lakes.

▶ 12 p.



Dovilė Rūkaitė / photo by R. Danisevičius (lrytas.lt)



Across:

- 1 Ancient candelabrum looted from the Temple.
- 2 No one's quite sure how to spell it in English; peak oil turned out wrong.
- 3 One ancient king's symbol, now a symbol of the Jewish nation and state (three words, write without spaces).
- 4 Another word for yarmulke more popular in the East.
- 5 Literally "doorpost" in Hebrew, either a mitzvah or a lucky charm bringing divine protection.

Down:

- 6 First five books of Moses.
- 7 Prayer shawl.
- 8 Hebraic gematria value of the Tetragrammaton; also, Moses's generation (write full number without spaces or hyphens).
- 9 Rhymes with ladle, cradle, meidl, spin the...
- 10 Ancient symbol protects against the evil eye, word means 5 in Arabic and almost the same in Hebrew.

Litvak Influence on Lithuanian Cuisine



Tomas Rimydis / photo by Danisevičius (lrytas.lt)

11 p. ►

Tomas Rimydis admits that the first two years of Ertlio Namas were difficult given the Covid-19 pandemic and their unconventional menu, at least in the eyes of Lithuanians.

"People didn't understand no potatoes and pork," he said.

They struggled with 20% occupancy in those early years, attracting almost exclusively tourists.

Now, post-Covid lockdowns, Rimydis estimates that locals make up approximately 90% of their clientele with 100% occupancy almost every night.

Dinner service is an event, housed in an intimately lit 17th-Century home with a curtain separating the entrance into the modestly sized dining area.

The waiter pulls the curtain back like an usher granting you entrance into the theatre. The way waiters explain the history behind each dish feels like a moderately paced theatrical performance.

The dishes start in the 15th Century (beetroot bread with roasted sunflower seeds) and work their way up to the 19th Century (quince dessert with chocolate and bread ice cream). There's everything from wild game (for meat eaters) to beetroot soup, a puree of Jerusalem artichokes and the ever-popular honey cake in-between.

A vegetarian adaptation was easy, considering the extra fasting (from meat) that Lithuanian dukes and nobles historically partook in. This, our waiter explained, was to prove to the Pope how serious they were about their Catholicism.

I travel often for food. Few experiences have drastically altered my conception of a national cuisine as my time in Vilnius. Don't let the facade of meat and potatoes fool you. The fare is as rich and complex as what most of us love about Italian, Japanese or French cuisine. These dishes are firmly rooted in their unique history: persistent ancient traditions, dukes with a taste for all things wild, Jewish resilience and other influences through the centuries.

Litvak Culinary Heritage

Rugelakh, Yiddish ראגעלעך, Hebrew רוג'לך, is a stuffed pastry which originates in the Polish Jewish community. This sweet is sometimes called a Jewish croissant. The store windows of bakeries in Israeli often contain mountains of them with still-hot chocolate filling. The traditional *rugelakh* is formed in the shape of crescent moon with filling. Some sources claim *rugelakh* and the French croissant have a common origin from Vienna recalling the victory against the Turks in the Battle of Vienna in 1683. This appears to be nothing more than a city legend because *rugelakh* and its possible forefather kipferl appeared in the early Modern Age whereas the contemporary croissant was not present before the 19th century. The legendary *rugelakh* is scheduled to make an appearance soon at the Bagel Shop Café.

Here's a recipe in video format from [onceuponachef.com](https://www.onceuponachef.com):

