

THE MANY THINGS FELDER LEFT OUT IN HIS LITHUANIA REBUTTAL

Now it is my turn to address the “inaccuracies” Steve Felder perceives in my June 8 letter in response to his earlier article on Lithuania. I am fully aware that his 48-hour tour of Lithuania was arranged by the JDC.

I am also well informed about the outstanding work of The Joint which has always maintained distance from local politics and refrains from falling into the trap of applauding a far-right government which dispenses little gestures for the benefit of naïve foreign visitors.

Mr Felder should realise that the prime minister who welcomed him and his group so cordially, is the very same prime minister who signed off personally on the four-day reburial ceremonies last month honouring Nazi collaborator Juozas Abrazevicius (Brazaitis).

Felder notes that my statement of “significant increases in anti-Semitism” is unsubstantiated by any available data. I refer him to the April 19 Simon Wiesenthal Report: Lithuania 2012: Holocaust Distortion as Background for Increased for Anti-Semitism (see particularly page 8, “A Dangerous Increase in Anti-Semitic Incitement and Attacks”). A current SWC Report dated June 2012, “European Extremist Movements,” states that “the Continent’s oldest disease - Jew hatred - is metastasising... (see page 12 for the focus on Lithuania): http://www.wiesenthal.com/atf/cf/%7B54d385e6-f1b9-4e9f-8e94-890c3e6dd277%7D/FINAL_REPORT_62012.PDF

I agree that Lithuania should be commended for its passage of the \$53 million restitution package. However, here Mr Felder is inaccurate in referring to it as a “property restitution fund”. The payments are to be made over 10 years, ensuring that Holocaust survivors receive almost nothing.

The bulk of the funds are allocated to Jewish heritage/state heritage projects with a relatively small amount dedicated to communal property and nothing for private property. In reality the sum is but

a tiny fraction of the true current value of the property that was confiscated from Jews.

And who will be the beneficiaries of the Jewish heritage projects? The goal is to increase tourism to boost the ailing economy. The expectation is that foreign Litvaks will pump dollars into Lithuania, a country whose government has invested heavily in the distortion of the history of the Holocaust.

Mr Felder seems to be under the impression that I have suffered negative experiences during my visits to Lithuania. On the contrary, during my four lengthy trips there I have wandered into the most remote villages, meeting and befriending delightful Lithuanian people.

My judgement and my criticism of Lithuania is not the reflection of my personal visits to the country, but the result of 20 years of following and studying the policies and politics, the attitudes and actions of the Lithuanian government.

I have not met with prime ministers or other elites, but I have spoken heart-to-heart in Yiddish with members of the Jewish community - from its leaders to those who depend on Rabbi Krinsky’s soup kitchen for their daily meals. Perhaps I have got a more realistic reading of how they feel and live.

Felder’s rather naïve and exuberant evaluation of the country based on a mere 48 hours of being shuttled around to meet diplomats and selected members of the Jewish community seems to have left him clueless and even insensitive to the present and past suffering of the withering Jewish population. Which is why his article came across as little more than a PR-inspired narrative helpful only to the Lithuanian government’s PR projects.

Mr Felder should also know that while he was well treated in regard to his request for Lithuanian citizenship, this is hardly a general trend. The country’s citizenship laws are still widely condemned as racist.

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