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Case of Nazi Uniform and Comments about Sticking Jews in Ovens Goes to Court

by Nerijus Povilaitis

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The Kaunas District Court has heard an administrative law violation case over the public demonstration of Nazi symbolism.

[photo caption:] A. Šeškanas, who works in England, told the court he didn't know it was against the law in Lithuania to wear a Nazi officer's uniform in public. Photo: N. Povilaitis

Šeškanas, an IT specialist living in the United Kingdom, stood in court following his arrest at a bar in the old town of Kaunas, Lithuania on March 30, where he was walking around dressed in a German SS lieutenant's uniform.

British subject Richard S., who lives and studies in Kaunas, turned the Lithuanian who had briefly returned to Lithuania in to police. S. was a main witness in the investigation of the crime with which Šeškanas was accused.

Drunken Nazi Looking for Jews

Recalling the evening of March 30, the Brit who lives in the Kaunas old town said he had noticed by accident a man wearing a German Nazi officer's uniform sitting at the cafe next to his apartment.

"When I saw the Nazi I decided I needed to do something," the British photographer currently studying the history of the Kaunas Jewish community said.

The foreign citizen went to the bar, ordered tea and watched the Nazi.

"He was rather drunk and was really getting into his role. He went outside to smoke two or three times, giving the usual Nazi salute," the Brit told the court.

He said he asked the man wearing the Nazi SS uniform what he was trying to convey through his behavior.

"He replied he was looking for Jews whom he planned to stick in an oven," Richard S. testified.

Upset by the public demonstration of Nazi symbolism and talk of burning Jews, the foreign citizen called police. The patrol who arrived took Šeškanas dressed as an SS officer to the police station and determined he had a blood/alcohol level of 1.88 per mils (0.188 percent), making him legally drunk.

Costume Rented in England

Arriving from England for the trial, Šeškanas claimed he had become the victim of an unfortunate misunderstanding.

"I had no intention of demonstrating Nazi symbolism, I was wearing the uniform in the bar where I ended up after a thematic [costume] party," Šeškanas said.

The IT specialist said he rented the costume in England and had been planning to wear it at a friend's birthday party held in Kaunas.

"I knew the theme for the party would be the history of war, so I just picked out the uniform at random at the rental company. The German uniform looked best to me and it fit me the best. If I had known its public demonstration is forbidden in Lithuania, I really would not have brought it here," Šeškanas said.

The programmer told the court there is no ban on wearing the uniform of any military in England, even a Nazi German uniform.

Ambling around the Kaunas Old Town

When Šeškanas arrived at the birthday party being held for his friend in the Vilijampole [Slobodka] neighborhood in Kaunas, he didn't conceal he had been drinking. The man who wore the Nazi uniform claimed he ended up in the city center and upset the British man completely accidentally.

The inebriated emigrant together with a Kaunas man from the party dressed as a Jewish rabbi planned to go to the latter's home.

On the way, he remembered his sister was celebrating her birthday, so the pair decided to wish her well.

Šeškanas in Nazi uniform attended this birthday party held at a restaurant near the Old Town Hall in the Kaunas center, and then, together with the fellow dressed as rabbi, went to the Pjazz [Pizza Jazz chain, sometimes called PJazz] bar.

There the Brit noticed him and called the police.

During the court's consideration of the case, the testimony of the Brit and the Lithuanian was contradictory. Šeškanas claimed Richard S. approached him asking for cigarettes and 2 litas, which S. categorically denied.

The Brit upset by the Lithuanian's behavior said it wasn't important to him what sort of fine would be levied against Šeškanas, and said the important thing was to educate society about the crimes committed by the Nazis.

Museum Wants the Uniform

An expert witness was summoned to give testimony during the trial, Algirdas Markūnas, who is the director of the History of Modern Warfare Department at the Vytautas the Great War Museum [in Kaunas].

He didn't hide his admiration upon examining the Nazi officer's uniform worn by Šeškanas. He said at least one of the three medals was authentic, and that although the officer's cap wasn't complete and lacked two parts, it was manufactured during the time of the Third Reich.

"Nazi uniforms are rather rare. Our museum does not have one of these. Therefore, I'd like to ask the court, if it is possible, to give it to the museum rather than having it destroyed," the historian said.

Markūnas said the youth of today lack historical information and an SS officer's uniform being placed on display at the museum would serve the cause of educating society.

The court plans to issue a verdict in the case on Friday. The administrative law code prescribes a fine ranging from 500 to 1,000 litas and confiscation of items for the public demonstration of Nazi and Soviet symbols.