May 12, 2016, speak of “earth movement,” which means massive bulldozers digging trenches. The letters also speak of driving piles in the cemetery. The “fill” to be removed includes the remains of the Jews buried near the building in question, the Sports Palace, a region described by the U.S. Embassy as the “center of the cemetery.”

The agreement reached between CPJCE and the Lithuanian government speaks gently of the “doubt of finding bone fragments.” This is a cemetery where there were Jews buried everywhere. Does a reasonable belief doubt that bone fragments will be discovered here? (Unless the planned digging mirrors the Zürich experience, where giant earth moving equipment excavated a cemetery, crushing all bones and human remains beyond recognition.)

“Concrete flowerpots” are described as preventing “public mass gathering on the cemetery ground,” while “the usage of the Congress center should be in the spirit of the sanctity of the surrounding vicinity.” One can visualize thousands of young Lithuanians leaving a concert or political rally, walking somberly amidst the flowerpots, exchanging sacred thoughts.

We are being told about the destruction and desecration of one of Jewry’s most sacred sites. Of what use will the promised CPJCE “oversight” be as the remains of kadosh are crushed, and the cemetery where the Gra and the Ger Tzedek once lay is despoiled? This is a cemetery with an area where Jews feared to enter because lamedvov tzaddikim were believed to be buried there.

All the placating words will not change the reality that digging will take place and pigs will be driven through the heart of a living cemetery!

It’s important to describe the process whereby the Lithuanians found cover for its excavations scheme. It began with a representative of CPJCE visiting Lithuania early in 2015 and announcing support for a project without seeing any plans.

It continued with Lithuanian officials meeting Jewish groups, particularly in the United States, publishing photographs of smiling leaders and Lithuanian representatives engaged in friendly conversation. The press was fed glowing reports of friendship and understanding between American Jews and Lithuanian representatives.

The State Department too had assigned decision-making authority relating to Jewish cemeteries to the U.S. Commission for the Preservation of America’s Heritage Abroad, so that well over a year by U.S. Embassy to the United States government being heard on this issue. This is probably why the Lithuanian government can speak so confidently about its Congress center “operating in compliance with all relevant international requirements.”

Most shocking is a statement signed by Rabbi Yeshaya Schlesinger and Rabbi Abraham Ginsberg of the CPJCE that:

“Further to the meeting of the rabbinical board, we the undersigned confirm that with the government’s written acceptance of the above clarifications, the CPJCE approves and endorses the ‘Vilnius Palace of Concerts and Sport conversion to Congress Center 2016 plan B’ and wish this venture every success.”

The Lithuanians used another tool to support their proposed excavation in the cemetery. GPR (Ground Penetrating Radar) was proposed to the Lithuanian government in 2008 by a working group that was convinced this technology could detect burials underground. As it turns out, GPR is a highly limited technology that can detect “anomalies” which under certain circumstances can be correlated to burials. In a cemetery such as Shnipskop, it is impossible to emerge with anything other than a null result. Bodies buried without a coffin, after hundreds of years of decay, show up no differently than do pebbles and stones. The nature of the sand through which the electromagnetic radiation must travel and be reflected also mitigates against any kind of indication.

It is not surprising then that the Lithuanians underook a GPR review of the Shnipskop cemetery. It is surprising that they had the effrontery to use a null result to “prove” that there are no burials in the area of the Sports Palace, a section well known to have had hundreds if not thousands of burials.

We will persist in trying to stop this project. But if chas veshalom it carries through, there is ample shame and lots of blame to be shared.