



**Europos žmogaus teisių fondas
Europejska Fundacja Praw Człowieka
European Foundation of Human Rights
Европейский Фонд Прав Человека**

Creative Europe Desk in Lithuania

International cultural programme centre

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25th of April, 2019, Vilnius

Dear Madam,

I am writing on behalf of the European Foundation of Human Rights (EFHR), a non-governmental organization in Vilnius focused on providing legal advice and assistance to anyone who has been a victim of discrimination and human rights mistreatment in the public and private sphere, or to those who have witnessed such abuses.

By this letter we would like to draw your attention to the legal case recently filed in Vilnius Court ([see report](#)) concerning the reconstruction work in the territory of the Vilnius Palace of Concerts and Sports which would desecrate the Old Šnipiškės (Piramont) Jewish Cemetery. We are convinced that it is of the highest importance that this material be carefully reviewed by the EU Creative Europe program, which is sponsoring the audio-visual installations at the Vilnius Palace of Concerts and Sports taking place on April 27-28, 2019. These events should be moved to another venue.

The Vilnius Palace of Concerts and Sports was founded on the territory of the Old Šnipiškės (Piramont) Jewish Cemetery, namely on the human remains buried there, which were mixed in its base. Thousands of intact burials surround the building in all directions. National and international communities have been trying for years to influence the decision-makers urging them to provide a meaningful response to the issue by rejecting any plans for the reconstruction of the Vilnius Palace of Concerts and Sports and to allow the restoration of the cemetery, while moving the convention center project to another venue. An international petition by a Vilnius resident this week [approached the 46,000 signature mark](#). The opposition to desecrating the Jewish cemetery [has come from around the world](#), including virtually all Lithuanian-origin rabbis and many human rights advocates of all backgrounds.

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Unfortunately, this year Turto bankas (Lithuania's state-owned Property Bank) is planning to announce a tender process for the rental of the Vilnius Palace of Concerts and Sports. To this end, EFHR is coordinating a legal case which aims to prevent reconstruction works and to stop these gross disrespect and injustices towards those deceased and their relatives. At the moment, the property is derelict, with none of the facilities needed for a respectful modern arts or music event. It looks to the world as if this is a purposeful attempt to further victimize (and humiliate and downgrade) a minority that was subjected to genocide in the Holocaust (which is why the thousands buried in the old Jewish cemetery have no descendants or relatives to properly take up this cause).

EFHR is deeply concerned, that entertaining people on the graves of thousands of people is contrary to the principles of equal rights and morality; this would never happen at a revered cemetery of the Christian Lithuanian majority. Organizing performances and installations on the territory of Vilnius Palace of Concerts and Sports is an affront. This is not only 'dancing on the graves', as [one of Vilnius's last Holocaust survivors put it so powerfully](#). It may also be a violation of the European Union's fundamental values, in particular – respect for human dignity and human rights, equality and the rule of law.

Yours faithfully,

European Foundation of Human Rights lawyer

Monika Guliakaitė

