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Lithuanian Jews Expect/Hope for Greater Compensation (video)

Edgaras Kiškis ("Lietuvos ryto" television)

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Lithuanian Jews are standing firm against a plan to pay 3 million litas to Holocaust victims from 128 million litas set aside for compensating seized property. Jewish representatives say money for Holocaust victims needs to be allocated separately. The parliament is considering the government's plan for compensating Jews. MP Algirdas Sysas says exceptions should not be made for Jews.



Government doesn't know should 3 million litas be distributed to Jewish victims of the holocaust. Photo: P. Lileikis

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If the parliament approves the Government's plans for paying out to Lithuanian Jews, beginning in 2012, compensation for Jewish religious community property nationalized or seized illegally, the monies will be

distributed through a special Government fund. But the plan is to pay 3 million of the 128 million directly to Jews who suffered from the Holocaust rather than to the communities. The Jewish communities are holding firm against the idea, and they say they want additional money to be allocated for Holocaust victims instead of compensating them from funds earmarked for property restitution.

“It wasn’t Lithuania but it was Lithuanians who contributed to the murder of Jews. So we didn’t murder ourselves and we shouldn’t have to now pay ourselves. Now we are supposed to pay Holocaust victims from compensation to religious communities. It doesn’t make sense,” Kaunas Jewish community charge d’affaires [director] Moishe Bairak said.

The Vilnius Jewish Community is hoping that their demands will be heard during the parliament’s consideration of the Government’s plan.

“If a Jew doesn’t hope, that means he’s a dead Jew. But so far, I’m still alive,” deputy director of the Lithuanian Jewish Community Faina Kukliansky said.

The Government doesn’t have a plan for how those 3 million litas would be distributed to Holocaust victims. The Justice Minister was unable to say why the plan was for allocating 3 million rather than one million or 10 million.

“This is a matter of political decision and the parliament will be able to decide how much to allocate. It’s not written in stone that it should be this way and not that way. The distribution mechanism has not been fully defined by law. There is a point that the money should come from a fund, the detailed regulation of which will have to be planned by the Government,” justice minister Remigijus Simasius said.

Social democrat Algirdas Sysas said Jews shouldn’t be made an exception and called upon Parliament not to allocate compensation to Holocaust victims. The politician warned that money will just further divide the already self-conflicted Lithuanian Jewish communities.

“I think that it would be a bad thing in our legal system if we make exceptions in law for suffering people [victims]. In Lithuania there are people who have suffered [victims], there is a law for victims, and pensions are paid to people who have suffered, those who were deported, those who

suffered from the repressive occupational regimes, everything is covered in other laws,” Social Democratic faction member Algirdas Sysas said.

Lithuanian Jews are also dissatisfied with the scope of compensation. They allege that 128 million would only equate to about 30% of the property held by Jewish communities.

Parliament approved for further consideration the Government’s plans for compensation for Jews and the draft legislation is now being considered in committees.

[Comments]