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A. Ažubalis: The EU will Continue Discussion on the Crimes of Communist Regimes

Delfi / from BNS
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The European Union will continue discussion on the desire of Lithuania and other EU states to judge equally the crimes of Nazi and Communist regimes, Lithuanian foreign minister Audronius Ažubalis said Wednesday.

He said the letter by ministers from six Eastern and Central European countries on criminalizing the crimes of Communist regimes had achieved its goal, although the European Commission is so far looking at it skeptically.

The foreign minister explained that the most important achievement was for discussion of the issue to continue within the European Commission. Azubalis said it took Germany six years to get Nazi crimes criminalized across the European Community.

“The most important thing is that the Commission will continue the consideration of this question, that is the main thing that we were seeking, that this question wouldn't get silenced this year. Because it could have happened this way, that the Commission, basing itself on the report could have closed this question,” Azubalis told reporters Wednesday at the Lithuanian parliament.

“I can really rejoice and can say confidently to all that this letter has achieved its goal, the question wasn't closed, it will be considered further. The goal of the letter by six ministers was to get the Commission's attention on how complicated this question is and that it demands the very serious attention of the Commission, and that's just what we got,” the minister said.

The UK daily *Guardian* reported the European Commission rejected the suggestion by Lithuania and other Eastern European countries to create

punishments for denying the crimes of Communist regimes.

“There is no consensus on it. The different member states have wildly differing approaches,” European Commission spokesman Matthew Newman told the newspaper.

“At this stage, the conditions to make a legislative proposal have not been met. The commission will continue to keep this matter under review,” he said.

This month Lithuania and five other Central and Eastern European states called upon the European Commission to judge adequately totalitarian regimes, seeking appropriate attention for crimes of the Communist regime.

“The principle of justice should ensure a truthful consideration of the victims of every totalitarian regime,” the letter addressed to European Justice Commissioner Viviane Reding said. BNS received a copy of the letter.

In the letter, the six ministers expressed the hope that the European Commission will take further steps “including a possible legal initiative to criminalize the justification, denial or gross trivialization of the crimes of totalitarian crimes against groups of people defined by social status or political convictions.”

The foreign ministers of Lithuania, Bulgaria, Hungary, Latvia, Romania and the Czech Republic signed the letter. It was published in the run-up to a decision by the European Commission on an assessment of crimes by totalitarian regimes at the European level and on a corresponding legal instrument, the Lithuanian Foreign Ministry reported.

Ažubalis, who initiated the letter, told BNS that in part of Europe the crimes of the Communist regime are still not understood correctly.

“Everyone knows about the crimes of Nazism, but only part of Europe knows about the crimes of the totalitarian Communist regime,” he said.

Lithuanian officials say that at the beginning of the Soviet occupation Lithuania lost 780,000 people, more than 440,000 fled the country or were repatriated and 275,000 were sent to gulags or deported, and that 20,000 resistance fighters died as well as another 25,000 at the front.

The Nazis and their collaborators murdered more than 200,000 Jews in

Lithuania.

“The bottom line is, obviously, what they did was horrendous, but Communist regimes did not target ethnic minorities,” Commission representative Newman said.

This summer Lithuania adopted a law that punishes public approval of the aggression of the USSR or Nazi Germany against Lithuania with two years imprisonment. The same law provides the same punishment for approving of, denying or grossly belittling the scope of the genocide, and crimes against humanity, the USSR and Nazi Germany committed in Lithuania.

The law also provides punishment to those who approve of aggression committed against Lithuania in 1990 and 1991, as well as for denial or gross deprecation.

Different European states have different regulations on denying or belittling grave crimes. The Czech Republic and Poland provide punishment for approving of Nazi or Soviet crimes of genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes, and for justifying them, denying them or belittling their scope.

Austria, Bulgaria, France, Germany and Slovakia will punish for approving Nazi crimes of genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity, or for justifying, belittling or denying them, whereas Spain, Portugal, Luxembourg, Romania and Switzerland do the same but go a step further in criminalizing approval, denial, etc. of similar crimes, without specifying the perpetrators. France has expanded application of laws to include the Armenian genocide.