

**WIESENTHAL CENTER TO LITHUANIAN AUTHORITIES:
DESECRATION OF PONÁR MEMORIAL TO SHOAH VICTIMS IS
DIRECTLY RELATED TO GOVERNMENT EFFORTS TO MINIMIZE
LOCAL COMPLICITY IN HOLOCAUST CRIMES**

Jerusalem — The Simon Wiesenthal Center today harshly criticized the Lithuanian government for trying to hide or minimize the highly-significant role of local Nazi collaborators in Holocaust crimes and attributed last weekend's desecration of the memorial at Ponár, the site of the mass murder of 70,000 Jews during the Holocaust, to the falsification of World War II history by local historians with governmental sponsorship and support. In a statement issued here today by its chief Nazi-hunter, Israel director Dr. Efraim Zuroff, the Center pointed to the denial at a recent international conference sponsored by the government at the Seimas [Lithuanian Parliament] of the lethal violence launched by Lithuanians against Jews in at least 40 different locations before the arrival of Nazi troops, as an example of the continuing efforts by the authorities to try to conceal the active participation by Lithuanians in the mass murder of Jews during World War II.

According to Zuroff:

“The ongoing government-sponsored and financed distortion, minimization, and downplaying of the critical role played by Lithuanian Nazi collaborators in Holocaust crimes has created an anti-Semitic atmosphere in which slogans such as “Hitler was right,” which was scrawled on the Ponár memorial, seem natural. After all, if as was claimed at the recent historical conference held at the Seimas, Jewish historians such as eminent Hebrew University professor Dov Levin purposely lied about the scope of Lithuanian criminality during the Shoa, such desecrations of Holocaust memorials become almost understandable. The time has come for the European Union to make clear to the Lithuanian authorities that membership obligates them to refrain from distorting the history of World War II for political reasons and to stop the resultant incitement against the local Jewish community.

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