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Portion of Funds Allocated for Palace to go to Jewish Library

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With construction of the Magnates' Palace in Vilnius mired down, the Lithuanian Cultural Ministry has begun gradually releasing funds allocated for it [to other projects].

Culture minister Arūnas Gelūnas ordered 653,000 of the 16 million litas allocated for the Magnates' Palace construction this year to be used for refurbishing administrative premises on Gedimino Prospect in Vilnius for use by the Jewish Library.

The culture minister said that the decision came because implementing the Jewish Library project was already planned, but there weren't funds allocated, and taking money from the wallet of the Magnates' Palace is allowed by law because of the questions surrounding its construction.

“It was said that with the lack of clarity over the financing of the Magnates' Palace, there might be a reallocation for other cultural sites. The Jewish Library is a project which we had pledged to carry out during the Year of the Holocaust. There were plans to implement it, but budget allocations hadn't been made, and this then began to veer toward international scandal,” Gelūnas told BNS.

He said US citizen Wyman Brent, one of the initiators of the museum [sic, i.e. library], began wondering why work on the Jewish Library wasn't progressing.

“People in the US who are donating books to the library and who are receiving gifts from different libraries around the world, private individuals whose books will become the library collection, all began to wonder why nothing is happening and why the Lithuanian side isn’t keeping its pledges,” the minister said.

“This was an ‘supplementary’ allocation ecision. Not wanting a blemish on Lithuania for failing to carry out its international obligations, we reallocated those budgetary allocations, but I would call this a cosmetic reallocation,” the head of the culture ministry said.

He said the premises on Gedimino Prospect are in poor condition currently and will need to be renovated quickly. It is expected the Jewish Library will open its doors this autumn.

Work on the Magnates’ Palace was halted at the beginning of the year when the Public Procurement Council discovered a large number of violations in the agreement with the construction contractor, Panevėžio statybos trestu (PST), and demanded that the contract be annulled. Currently the culture ministry has a working group negotiating with PST on an amicable withdrawal of the agreement.

The cost of reconstructing the Magnates’ Palace grew more than three times over the decade, from 114 million to 367 million litas. Possible violations of law have led to a complaint filed with the Prosecutor General’s Office.

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