

Text of the Lithuanian government's press release distributed by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs on 15 July 2011 on the archaeological works at the site of the Great Synagogue in Vilnius:

Remains of Historical Synagogue Uncovered in Vilnius

Archeologists have uncovered remains of the Great Synagogue in the capital of Lithuania Vilnius, which was home to a 100,000 strong local Jewish community before World War II.

These excavations should reinforce the attempts of Lithuanian Government to come to terms with the past, including the vast Jewish heritage that was significantly damaged during the years of both the Nazi and the Soviet occupations.

The government program on the restoration of representative elements of the historical Ghetto in Vilnius was approved in September 2000. However, political and, more importantly, financial support to its implementation has been somewhat lukewarm.

Things started to change when the government of Prime Minister Andrius Kubilius came into office in November 2008. A working group, headed by Member of Parliament Emanuelis Zingeris was established to reinvigorate the government's activities.

Zingeris is also chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee at the Lithuanian parliament and a long-standing president of the International Commission for the Evaluation of the Crimes of the Nazi and Soviet Occupation Regimes in Lithuania.

The working group commissioned archaeological excavations in the place of the Great Synagogue, which is now occupied by a Soviet-type kindergarten. The excavations revealed parts of the synagogue, including its tile floor and the main altar, being in a good condition.

"Making these parts visible should serve as a stimulus for the society to accelerate the process of restoration of the historical Ghetto", Prime Minister Kubilius said during his visit to the excavation site this Friday.

Kubilius also hopes that the new discovery will attract the interest of foreign and private investors, who would like to contribute to the restoration process.

The Great Synagogue of Vilna was built between 1630-1633. It was considered as one of the most important and beautiful synagogues around the world.

The synagogue was partly destroyed by the Nazis during World War II. The ruined synagogue and the whole “schulhof” complex which had grown around it were demolished by the Soviet authorities from 1955 to 1957.

2011 is declared as the Year of Remembrance for the Victims of the Holocaust in Lithuania.

Source: Government of Lithuania