

Head of Lithuania's Provisional Govt reburied in Kaunas

VILNIUS, May 20, BNS — The remains of Juozas Brazaitis, head of Lithuania's Provisional Government of 1941, were reburied in Kaunas, the country's second-largest city, on Sunday.

The remains, flown in from the United States on Thursday, were buried at the churchyard of the Christ's Resurrection Church. The reburial ceremony was attended by former President Valdas Adamkus, MEP Vytautas Landsbergis and Kaunas Mayor Andrius Kupcinskas. The ceremony was finished with Lithuania's anthem played by the army orchestra.

The Provisional Government is credited for its efforts to restore the Lithuanian statehood damaged by the Soviet occupation, while critics maintain that its policies were hostile towards the Jews. Lithuania's incumbent government has earmarked funds for the reburial, however, will not delegate ministers to official events.

Prime Minister Andrius Kubilius' government acknowledges that the reburial had caused controversy due to the Provisional Government's controversial activities. But it pays attention to the fact that the US Immigration Services dropped an investigation against Brazaitis in 1975 after it failed to find any evidence of anti-Jewish or pro-Nazi activities.

The Lithuanian Declaration of Independence was read out on the Kaunas radio in the morning of June 23, 1941. When the German troops entered the city on June 25, the city was fully controlled by rebels.

Brazaitis took the helm of the Provisional Government after Kazys Skirpa, an intended leader of the Lithuanian activist front for resisting the Soviet regime, was barred by the German administration from returning to Lithuania.

However, actions of Germany's military and, later, civilian administration soon deprived the Provisional Government of the control of the restored Lithuanian administration. After refusing to become subordinate to the Germans, the Provisional Government terminated its activities on August 5.

Landsbergis, former speaker of the Supreme Council-Reconstituent Seimas, said on Sunday Brazaitis assumed the service at a crucial time for his homeland.

"He felt obligation and took on responsibility during the bloodiest time of Europe's transformation," Landsbergis said.

He urged people not to forget the fact that the Provisional Government's main aim was "to declare and prove that Lithuania is not some republic of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, but it feels itself, wants to be itself and wants to have a short-lived government."

"The June Uprising was determined by the occupation a year earlier," Landsbergis underlined.

Criticizing the reburial ceremony, the Jewish Community of Lithuania said it linked Brazaitis with "repressive and discriminatory

laws aimed at ingratiating with the Nazi regime, as well as to statements by the Lithuanian Activist Front inciting massacres of Jews."

Emanuelis Zingeris, chairman of the parliamentary Committee on Foreign Affairs, also expressed his critical opinion about the Provision Government on Sunday by saying in his statement that "the Provisional Government cannot be considered a moral signpost during the building of a civil society."

The Provisional Government was formed during the June Uprising by the Lithuanian Activist Front which cooperated with the Germans. The uprising started after a war between Germany and the Soviet Union broke out.

Some Lithuanians awaited the war, liberation from the Soviets and arrival of the Germans, especially after Soviet deportations reached the peak in June. The newly-formed Provisional Government welcomed Germany's fight against Bolshevism and said that it was ready to join the building of a new Europe. But the massacre of thousands of Jews started in Lithuania during the first weeks after the German invasion.

Brazaitis was an active member of the underground anti-Nazi movement, while four members of the Provisional Government were later sent to German concentration camps.

Avoiding arrest during the war, he changed his name to Brazaitis and fled to Germany in 1944 and moved to the United States in 1951 to become an active figure in the Lithuanian expat community

Lithuania values Brazaitis' merits to the Lithuanian literature and his research and pedagogical work. In the interwar period, he was a lecturer at Vytautas Magnus University, worked as a journalist and wrote a few biographical books.

Vilnius newsroom, politika@bns.lt, +370 5 205 85 14

-----*****-----