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A Shadow of Deceit Envelops Jewish Community Leader Faina Kukliansky

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Internal scandals, deep splits and suspicions of lack of transparency on the part of Lithuanian Jewish Community (LJC) head Faina Kukliansky are shaking the community's life. A large part of the Jewish community is angry that Faina Kukliansky and her entourage are treacherously managing funds not only of the Community per se but also of the special funds from the Lithuanian state designated as compensation of good will, for the real estate of pre-Holocaust Jewish religious communities — a total of 37 million euros.

Does the Rejoicing Chairwoman Ignore the Court's Decisions?

The Chair of the LJC, Ms. F. Kukliansky, facing internal disagreements, issued a statement on Friday announcing that Renaldas Vaisbrodas was appointed as Executive Director of the LJC.

Lately R. Vaisbrodas has been the Secretary of the Liberal Movement party, and as some Liberals are joking, he had been noticed in the party only for having gone on a romantic journey with a current staff member of party's secretariat. Before that, he worked as Advisor to the President for Dalia Grybauskaitė. But almost nobody knows that R. Vaisbrodas got the position thanks to his (former?) spouse Neringa Vaisbrodė. She was a good university friend with a then very powerful Senior Advisor to the President who is now the permanent representative of Lithuania to the EU, Jovita Pranevičiūtė-Neliupšienė.

She “took care” of all her friends, including the Vaisbrods: N. Vaisbrodė became an Advisor to the Minister of Foreign Affairs Linas Linkevičius, and Ronaldas Vaisbrodas came to assist J. Pranevičiūtė-Neliupšienė in the Presidential Office. As she left to become an ambassador, Vaisbrodas became Advisor to the President for Foreign Policy until his relations with the Liberal Movement were publicly revealed. It was declared that the team of President Dalia Grybauskaitė avoided associations with any political parties, so Ronaldas Vaisbrodas lost his job there and became Chief of the Secretariat for the Liberals.

The appointment of R. Vaisbrodas has aroused outrage in the Jewish community. Almost everyone knows that a fierce legal case is going on regarding the legitimacy of the election of the Council of the Lithuanian Jewish Community and its chairperson Ms. F. Kukliansky. Moreover, the decision of the Vilnius City District Court to impose interim measures regarding certain amendments to some of the Community bylaws, that led to Ms. Kukliansky’s nontransparent and possibly illegal prolongation of her term in office, was ignored. As a result, the Vilnius Jewish Community, which unites much more than half of the Lithuanian Jews, appealed to the Courts.

Concealing the Appointment of Vaisbrodas

On Thursday, 3 August 2017, the news portal Alfa.lt was interested in whether the decision to appoint Mr. Vaisbrodas as Executive Director of the Lithuanian Jewish Community had been planned, and why one would not wait for a conclusion to the current legal disputes focusing on the legitimacy of the chairperson herself. But the candidate himself, when asked whether he will be appointed as Executive Director of the LJC, tried to confuse the journalists by saying that he “is not a contender for the position of chairman of the Jewish Community.”

At the same time, the Chairperson of the LJC by her own opinion, but not the opinion of the majority of the community, was silent, saying only that “legal disputes are settled in court.” However, as a lawyer herself, Ms. Kukliansky should be perfectly aware of the fundamental principle of law that states that there is no law of unlawfulness, as far as refraining from decisions is concerned. It is alleged that R. Vaisbrodas had probably been proposed by Joseph Burstein, the deposed chairperson of the Šiauliai Jewish Community, a businessman who is a loyalist of F. Kukliansky. Despite being deposed, he continues to be supported by Ms. Kukliansky.

Alfa.lt asked “Vilniaus vandenys,” the large Vilnius-based water supply company, whether it was on the initiative of Mr. Burstein that Mr. R. Vaisbrodas, former secretary of the Liberal Movement, was in fact organizing a visit of this municipal company to Israel, they said that visits were not and are not planned.

Spat on the Voice of the Community

The Chair of the LJC Ms. F. Kukliansky together with her cronies managed to capture not only the posts of Community leaders but also the enormous amount of funds designated for the Community.

Documents available to the portal Alfa.lt show that Ms. F. Kukliansky's LJC simply turned everything into a source of benefit for herself and her closest circle of cronies. Ms. F. Kukliansky, the chair of the Lithuanian Jewish Community, pays the bills issued by herself — the lawyer Ms. F. Kukliansky. In the course of projects, even the travel expenses of her husband Alfonsas are paid, including per diems, Ms. F. Kukliansky's personal car repairs and other numerous miscellaneous expenses, from small to large. And the most important point is that it is a constant practice of behavior. In a situation such as this the financial dealings call for a separate and extensive inquiry, to which we will, in any case, return later.

Nepotism thrives too. The Vilnius Jewish Community has been aggravated by the affair related to Ms. F. Kukliansky's daughter. In October of 2016 a kindergarten “Shalom” was set up for the Lithuanian Jewish Community. Misha Jakobas , the director of the Sholem Aleichem Public School, was appointed also as director of the kindergarten without the consent of the Council of the Lithuanian Jewish Community. On 3 February 2017, the Council of the LJC approved the budget of the LJC, in which 100,000 euros were allocated for the kindergarten “Shalom.” On the same day, the director, the same Misha Jakobas, as Director of Youth Affairs at the LJC (such a position did not exist at the LJC at the time), was dismissed without the approval of the same Council. But he was authorized to sign a contract with a new kindergarten Director. And again, on the same day, Ruth Reches was appointed as a Director of the Lithuanian Jewish kindergarten “Shalom” providing her a monthly salary. This was done without any competition open to the public and without any approval from the Board. Ruth Reches is the daughter of F. Kukliansky.

The Goodwill Fund, which distributes the 37 million EUR allocated by the Lithuanian state, is headed by two presidents, LJC Chairman Ms. F.

Kukliansky and Rabbi Andrew Baker, Director of International Affairs at the American Jewish Committee.

Fraud for Extension of Term in Office

At the end of F. Kukliansky's 4 year term (2017) as the Chair of the Lithuanian Jewish Community, anger was growing concerning her management of the LJC. And she came up with an incredible scheme of how to continue controlling the LJC and at the same time the Goodwill Fund.

The LJC consists of regional communities and various community-based organizations (NGOs). First, the Vilnius Jewish Community (VJC), which has more than 2,200 members, rebelled. The VJC is the largest of the (LJC) constituent organizations, it has twice as many members as all the remaining organizations put together. It has had 20 votes at the LJC conferences via the formula of one vote for each hundred community members, and it also thereby can determine the election of the Council and the Chair of the LJC. However, Simon Gurevich, Kukliansky's opponent, an active member of the community, declared that he would like to take part in the elections as a candidate for the chairpersonship of the Vilnius Jewish Community and made statements expressing his disagreement with Ms. F. Kukliansky's policies.

Ms. F. Kukliansky tried to stop the Vilnius Jewish Community's elections, hoping that they would take place after her own election at the LJC, but she did not succeed. And a more sinister scheme has been put into play. In spite of the fact that much more than half of the Jews in Lithuania are united by the Vilnius Jewish Community, Ms. Kukliansky decided to bypass the eventual results of the Vilnius Jewish Community election.

So what could be done in order to cling to all the money and power?

On April 19, 2017 the Lithuanian Jewish Community Council, which is under the control of Ms. F. Kukliansky, decided that all regional Jewish communities would now have only one vote (one delegate). Previously, 100 people were represented by one delegate. The Vilnius Community has 2,200 members, the Ukmergė Community 50 members, Panevėžys – 70 to 90, Šiauliai – 160 to 180, Kaunas – about 450 members.

Therefore, it was necessary to eliminate the Jews of Vilnius. In this way, the LJC statutes stipulating that everyone has one vote, except regional

communities whose votes are proportionate to the people represented, were annulled in the middle of the campaign. On 24 May, at the conference of the Vilnius Jewish Community, it was decided that an appeal to the courts would be made over such a deceptive election tactic. The court applied interim measures. But the day after that, Ms. F. Kukliansky was already able to take advantage of the unlawful electoral procedure, because on 28 May she was reelected in dubious elections, and the Board was elected, and the reports approved. The representatives of the 2,200 strong Vilnius Jewish Community were physically prevented from taking part in the election conference.

Money as the Tease for Control of the Delegates

The representatives of organizations (NGOs) participating in the 28 May 2017 Lithuanian Jewish Community Election Conference had to show their loyalty, because they were spiked by the money: two days before the Conference they received their funding approvals from the Good Will Foundation (one of its two chairpersons is Ms. F. Kukliansky), but the contracts were slated to be signed the day *after* the LJC election, after their “fair” votes were cast. Everything therefore went smoothly. They unanimously elected themselves to the Council, and any who disagreed were physically prevented from attending the LJC conference.

Simas (Shmuel) Levinas, chairman of the Vilnius and Lithuanian Jewish religious communities, has 2 votes out of the 28 legal entities and he was appointed on practical grounds by Ms. F. Kukliansky, given that those organizations are mostly paper-based entities. Two votes were given to Sergei Kanovich as the head of the NGOs “Maceva” and the Sheduva Memorial Fund. Ms. F. Kukliansky herself is the overseer of the LJC Fund for Charity, co-chairperson of the Good Will Foundation, and by that time an unlawful head of the Vilnius Jewish Community (i.e. appointed as its representative, although she has no right to do so after expiration of her earlier term). Gerc Zhakas also has as a matter of fact 3 votes because, in addition to the Kaunas Jewish Community (he is its Chair), he also represents the religious communities of the Kaunas Hasidic Community and the Kaunas Religious Community, which are both essentially more on paper than real. Four people and ten votes right away! And for the 2,200 Vilnius Jews — just one vote. There are also the Fajerlekh and Makabi organizations, which receive almost all their funds from the Good Will Fund via the budget provided by the LJC, and are therefore completely dependent on the wishes of Ms. Kukliansky. In general, most of the delegates who have supported Ms. Kukliansky have received support in one or another way for the organizations they manage: someone got money for a birthday,

someone for eye surgery abroad, a daughter of someone receives a salary, someone gets funds to change the tires for his private car using funds from other projects, etc. And so it emerges that the main principles of democracy were grossly violated by the same authoritarian control of the Lithuanian Jewish Community's present leadership.

The LJC budget is more than 2.5 million euros per year. The Good Will Fund receives 3.7 million euros each year from the State of Lithuania. The portal Alfa.lt tried to contact Ms. F. Kukliansky several times. She only briefly answered a few questions on the phone, and later, having promised to answer more fully, just disappeared, as if in hiding. The Alfa.lt news portal stands ready to publicize the positions of the Chair of the Lithuanian Jewish Community, if she would like.

How was a contact made even with a representative of the criminal world in order to keep power in the hands of one person? Where do the millions of the Lithuanian Jewish Community really end up? To be continued.

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