

FELDER'S WHIRLWIND LITHUANIAN TOUR WAS A PR EXERCISE

A second opinion on Steve Felder's enthusiastic article "Lithuania - a past not forgotten" (SAJR May 11): As an SA-born Litvak now living in Washington, DC, I share that mystique and the yearning to love Lithuania, the land to which I can trace my ancestors into the early 18th century.

I have visited Lithuania four times between 1992 and 2003. Would I visit Lithuania again? Definitely not!

Felder's 48-hour hyped-up whirlwind tour was a PR event staged by the Lithuanian government which is energetically courting SA Jews. Clearly the government is looking for SA Litvak investments to help revive their badly suffering economy.

Recently, to the horror of the tiny surviving Lithuanian Jewish community, an elaborate four-day chain of events in Vilnius (Vilna) and Kaunas (Kovno) was orchestrated and financed by the Lithuanian government.

The ceremonies and conferences honoured the memory of the 1941 Nazi-puppet Prime Minister Juozas Abrazevicius (Brazaitis) who had fled to Germany and later to the US after the war. (He had changed his surname to "Brazaitis" to elude arrest for his Nazi-collaboration activities.)

The signature of Abrazevicius appears at the top of documents ordering the formation of the Kovno Ghetto, the withdrawal of all human rights for Jews, and other measures designed to persecute and annihilate Lithuanian Jewry.

Brazaitis died in 1974 in the US. Almost 40 years later the Lithuanian government has had his remains exhumed, flown to Vilnius, and reburied with full honours. While the pomp and ceremony was going on for this "hero" who was responsible for thousands of Jewish deaths, Vilnius' only functioning synagogue was desecrated with green paint.

A few of the issues that are currently

plaguering Lithuanian-Jewish relations:

- Significant increases in anti-Semitism and anti-Semitic incidents. No arrests have been made.

- Annual massive neo-Nazi marches since 2008 in Vilnius and Kaunas on Lithuania's independence days, fully sanctioned by the government.

- Not one Lithuanian war criminal has been punished. It is documented that a minimum of 15 000 Lithuanians participated actively in murdering Jews.

- Government prosecutors have harassed ageing Jewish survivors in Vilnius and Israel with charges of "war crimes" because they had fought against the Nazis.

- The concept of a double-genocide in Lithuania is marketed ad nauseam. This is one step up the ladder from Holocaust denial. The only genocide in Lithuania was the Holocaust.

The Lithuanian government is engaged in dual-track politics and policies. While it is trying to create the appearance that it is striving for reconciliation with its small Litvak community and the larger world Jewry, it is simultaneously still intent on appeasing its ultra-nationalist faction.

Contrary to what Felder claims, the country has failed to confront its brutal Holocaust past.

Is it any wonder that they would prefer to tune out their past? Yet other nations have managed to overcome their shameful pasts. But that requires sincerity and honesty.

Most certainly Steve Felder did not see the real Lithuania during his visit complete with welcomes from the Prime Minister and other elites. He and others who are similarly taken in must go beyond the PR duplicity and look through a wider lens.

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The letter has been slightly shortened. - Editor