

## **OPEN LETTER**

The recent public statements by Remigijus Žemaitaitis, a Member of the Seimas, against our Jewish fellow citizens have once again revealed the anti-Semitic discourse that is still widespread and well established in the society, both on social media pages and in the activities of the ultra groups. What is most astounding is that ethnic hatred is being incited by a politician representing the State of Lithuania, using trivial anti-Semitic stereotypes. The public performance of a primitive, colloquial 'poem' about a 'stick' and a 'Jew' may seem to some people to be just a comic relic. However, one cannot overlook a more dangerous phenomenon: the demagogic distortion of history, which aims to consolidate in people's minds a narrative of the collective guilt when particular individuals and groups are identified with the entire national community. It is in this very way that Žemaitaitis holds "the Jews" responsible for the murder of the Lithuanians from the village of Pirčiupiai by the Nazi police. While some may think that it is not worth reacting to these and similar myths, as this would only encourage their dissemination, we believe that not reacting is a short-sighted turning away from civic responsibility. Hateful fakes still circulate on the Internet, and no doubt have the support of some of the public. It is a phenomenon that is dangerous for young people, society at large, and Lithuania. Hate speech violates elementary moral principles and the laws of the Republic of Lithuania, but this is not the only aspect of the harm caused by public anti-Semitic discourse. The special services hostile to Lithuania undoubtedly use every opportunity to present to the world the image of our country as a haven for anti-Semitism. Indifference towards anti-Semitic provocations can easily be interpreted as a tacit approval. Therefore, we believe that an unequivocal condemnation of public anti-Semitism by both the political elite and the active public, as well as continuous efforts to promote tolerance and the presentation of the undistorted history of Lithuania in schools, universities, and other educational institutions, is the only way to combat historical misinformation and hate speech.

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Andrew Baker, AJC Director, International Jewish Affairs, Member of the International Commission

Jonathan Brent, Executive Director/CEO, The YIVO Institute for Jewish Research, Member of the International Commission

Arūnas Bubnys, the General Director of the Genocide and resistance Research Centre of Lithuania, Member of the International Commission

Christoph Dieckmann, University of Bern, Member of the International Commission

Norman M. Naimark, Robert and Florence McDonnell Professor of East European Studies Stanford University, Member of the International Commission

Antony Polonsky, Emeritus Professor of Holocaust Studies at Brandeis University, Member of the International Commission

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