

Neo-Nazis Again Given Center of Kaunas, Lithuania's Second City, on Nation's Independence Day

Five Monitors from DefendingHistory.com Were on Hand to Protest Silently

VILNIUS, LITHUANIA, February 22, 2017 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Close to 200 neo-nazi marchers were again granted the center of Kaunas, Lithuania's second city, on the nation's February 16th independence day, for a march that covered the whole of the city's main thoroughfare, Laisves Aleja (Liberty Boulevard), concluding in the plaza of the historic presidential palace from the interwar period, when Kaunas (also known as Kovno) was the capital of the Lithuanian Republic. This year's independence day marked the 99th anniversary of the rise of independent, democratic Lithuania in 1918 after centuries of domination by the Russian Empire and other invaders.



The march's lead banner glorified Kazys Skirpa, who called for ethnic cleansing of his country's Jewish citizens months before the Nazi invasion of June 1941.

Kaunas was home to around 30,000 Jews before the Holocaust. Nearly all were murdered by the Nazis and their local collaborators. It was, therefore, particularly painful for the remaining Holocaust survivors in the region, and their families, that the lead banner of the marchers boasted a huge portrait glorifying Kazys Skirpa (Shkirpa), a pro-Nazi figure from that very city who demanded ethnic cleansing of his country's Jewish citizens many months before the Nazi invasion of 22 June 1941. It was as if, one survivor lamented, "the mayor and city council of Kaunas, by giving these guys the most cherished sections of our city on our beloved independence day, are saying that they are quite okay with the city's 30,000 Jews having been murdered."

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We came to remember the 30,000 murdered Jews of Kaunas on the independence day that they too patriotically marked with love every year. Why does the mayor legitimize those who celebrate the Holocaust?”

*DefendingHistory.com
(Vilnius, Lithuania)*

In an "American twist" this year, the image of Skirpa was made green to resemble Pepe the Frog, a cartoon figure which the Anti-Defamation League added to its data base of hate symbols during the 2016 U.S. presidential campaign. It has been associated particularly with the alt-right movement.

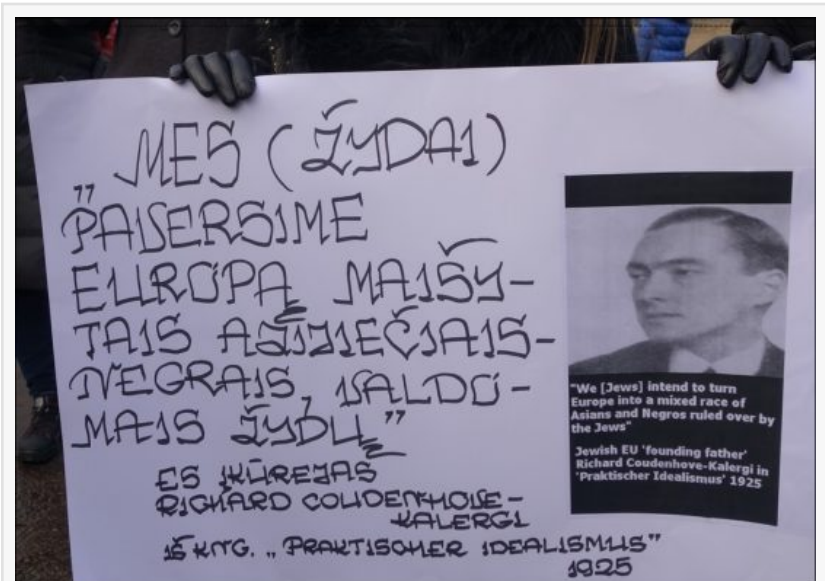
Another huge poster at the Kaunas march proclaimed in Lithuanian and English: "We Jews intend to

turn Europe into a mixed race of Asians and Negroes ruled over by the Jews." An even larger one had a list of 33 Jews who had allegedly worked for the KGB decades ago. Racist posters included a British school room of exclusively white children in the 1950s compared with a multiracial class today with this added information: "In northern England, not London!"

A number of the marchers had swastikas, both classic and "designer swastikas" embroidered on their jackets. For images and more information see www.DefendingHistory.com.

The official human rights organizations in the country were nowhere to be seen. Nore were there any international Jewish organizations on hand to observe the event this year. The only monitors, and silent protesters, were a five-person team from the journal DefendingHistory.com that is based in Vilnius, the capital of Lithuania. Defending History has for years called on the mayor and city council to move the neo-fascist march away from the center of the city on independence day, so as to preserve their free speech without the official stamp of legitimization, or even approval, that comes with enabling such demonstrations in major city centers on a nation's most hallowed day. The statement released reads, in part: "We came to remember the 30,000 murdered Jews of Kaunas on the independence day that they too patriotically marked with love every year. It is shocking that yet again the mayor and city council have gifted the center of the city, including Liberty Boulevard and the plaza of the historic presidential palace, on the cherished independence day, to the neo-nazis who so damage the name of modern, tolerant, democratic Lithuania."

Observers were relieved that there were fewer marchers than on previous years (in some years the numbers reached into the thousands, but this year's event was preceded by a major split in the neo-nazis' ranks that some observers think may be temporary). There was also praise for the generally balanced media coverage which this year included the voices of protest from the DefendingHistory.com team. There was special praise for the extensive in-depth coverage by The Weekly of Vilnius that is edited by the eminent Egyptian born journalist and public affairs analyst Nehro Khalil.



A poster at the march claimed that "the Jews" were plotting to create a new Europe of Asians and Blacks who would be ruled over by Jews...



One of the racist posters contrasted a "pure white" classroom scene from early 1950s Britain with a present-day multicultural class.

The Vilnius-based DefendingHistory.com team has been monitoring the far right's marches in Vilnius, Kaunas and Riga for many years.

Eyes are now turning to the nation's second, and equally cherished, independence day, March 11th, commemorating the momentous and daring declaration of independence from the Soviet Union in 1990, a feat that helped little Lithuania play an outsize historic role in the demise of the totalitarian Soviet Union that had occupied and stifled the Baltics since 1940 (with the exception of the Nazi German years, 1941-1944). Since 2008, the mayor and city council of Vilnius, the nation's capital, have allowed a similar neo-nazi march to take over the capital's central thoroughfare, Gedimino Boulevard, and similarly project an official legitimization for racist, antisemitic, xenophobic, homophobic, anti-refugee and racial-superiorist doctrine. DefendingHistory.com, which has also monitored the Vilnius event each year, has this week called on the Vilnius mayor and city council, as well as the nation's president and prime minister, to prevent the neo-nazi march from marring this year's March 11th independence day, still several weeks away, by moving the neo-nazis away from the center of the capital on independence day. Hopefully foreign human rights advocates will be making the same case to Lithuanian ambassadors internationally. For reports on previous years' marches in Vilnius see: www.defendinghistory.com/category/vilnius-neo-nazi-marches . On Kaunas see: www.defendinghistory.com/category/kaunas-neo-nazi-marches.

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