

Holocaust Memory Is Not a Photo Op

Lithuania repeatedly publishes photographs with Jewish organizations as evidence of partnership. The photographs prove that meetings occurred. They do not answer what due diligence the Jewish participants performed before lending their names and institutions to Lithuania's Holocaust-memory diplomacy.

On September 24, Lithuania's Foreign Ministry [announced](#) that Foreign Minister Kęstutis Budrys had met in New York the previous day with representatives of what the Ministry called the “main U.S. Jewish organizations.” The Ministry said the meeting addressed its action plan against antisemitism and xenophobia, Holocaust education, Jewish culture and heritage, and Holocaust remembrance. It also said substantial attention was devoted to the Vilnius Concert and Sports Palace and the territory of the old Šnipiškės Jewish cemetery. Budrys described Lithuania as pursuing a policy of “zero tolerance” for antisemitism. The Ministry published the encounter as evidence of partnership. It did not identify the organizations or the people representing them.

A photo is a photo. It proves that people stood together long enough for a camera to record them; it cannot validate a historical narrative, certify a government's conduct, or cure unresolved documentary contradictions. Yet Lithuania repeatedly deploys photographs with Jewish organizations as if Jewish proximity itself were a credential, evidence of normalcy, credibility, partnership and moral standing.



Kęstutis Budrys with representatives of U.S. Jewish organizations, New York, September 23, 2026. Photo: Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Lithuania.

That is why the identities of the people in the photograph matter. On September 24, I [filed a QES-signed bilingual records request](#) through the Foreign Ministry's official inbox asking it to identify

every U.S. Jewish organization represented at the September 23 meeting, the names and positions of the representatives, and any participant, attendance, agenda or invitation record that identifies them. I have confirmed filing; I have not yet received a registration acknowledgment.

When those names are known, the question is not whether Jewish organizations are allowed to meet Lithuania. Of course they are. The question is whether the people who allowed themselves and their institutions to be used in Lithuania's public presentation of Holocaust remembrance performed the minimum due diligence that such a role requires.

This was not the first photograph

On May 1, Lithuania's Vice-Minister of Foreign Affairs Taurimas Valys met in Los Angeles with what the Foreign Ministry described in English as the leadership of the American Jewish community. The Ministry's release did not name AJC, but the host was independently identified in the public pre-event record: [my April 24 article](#) quoted AJC's event notice identifying AJC as the host of the Lithuanian delegation. The Ministry said the meeting concerned bilateral relations, historical memory and cooperation against antisemitism and other forms of hatred. Again, the Lithuanian state published the encounter as part of its own diplomatic narrative.



Vice-Minister Taurimas Valys at the May 1, 2026 Los Angeles meeting hosted by AJC. Photo: Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Lithuania.

The photograph is useful to Lithuania. It shows Lithuanian officials surrounded by Jewish institutional figures. What it does not show is whether anyone in that room required Lithuania to

rectify the conduct that made such scrutiny necessary. The public presentation records access and cordiality. It does not record accountability.

Minimal due diligence would have found the problem

For the May 1 Los Angeles meeting, the defense that the problem was obscure is especially unavailable. On April 21, [my article “Virtues and Values”](#) publicly announced that AJC would meet Lithuanian officials on May 1 over Lithuania’s 157-point antisemitism plan and warned that the same state apparatus was being accused of distorting Holocaust history. The Times of Israel page for Eugene Levin’s [“Lithuania at AJC: A Warning”](#) is timestamped May 1 at 7:16 a.m. Israel time, which was still the evening of April 30 in Los Angeles. Levin named the meeting, set out five answers he expected Lithuania to give its critics, and wrote that Lithuania needed “the handshake, the photograph, the caption”; in his words, “the image is the product.” The notice was therefore aimed directly at the May 1 encounter before it took place in Los Angeles. There was also a local governmental record: [Beverly Hills](#), [West Hollywood](#) and [Los Angeles](#) each placed Lithuania’s Holocaust-history conduct on the public record in 2020. Those three 2020 records resolve and expressly address Lithuania. That Southern California notice existed six years before the May 1 meeting.

The institutional notice went back further. On April 9, 2019, [AJC itself](#) criticized the state-supported Genocide and Resistance Research Centre’s court filing defending Jonas Noreika, saying the filing sought to excuse his culpability and disputed well-established facts about the murder of Lithuanian Jews. Rabbi Andrew Baker stated: “No one today can claim ignorance about the role of Lithuanian collaborators.” Six days earlier, the [World Jewish Congress](#) had called a Genocide Centre document “nothing short of Holocaust revisionism” and demanded that the Lithuanian government denounce it, require the Centre to retract it publicly, and require apologies to the Lithuanian Jewish Community, world Jewry and the Lithuanian public. I have identified no public retraction or apology satisfying that demand. In December 2019, the [Lithuanian Jewish Community](#) was still publicly condemning new Genocide Centre statements on Noreika as Holocaust revisionism and denial.

Those warnings existed before either 2026 photograph. For May 1, there was meeting-specific public notice. For September, the May 28 IHRA petition and the August Brazaitis and Škirpa submissions had added an even larger documentary record. The due-diligence question is therefore elementary: did the representatives read the public record, including their own institutions’ record, before meeting Lithuania to discuss Holocaust memory? If they did, what did they ask Lithuania to correct? If they did not, why not?

No organization has to accept my conclusions. But an organization that lends its Jewish identity and institutional reputation to a government’s Holocaust-memory diplomacy should be able to demonstrate that it did not simply accept the government’s representations as self-authenticating. If Lithuania’s historical representations required public challenge in 2019, why should materially similar representations be accepted in 2026 without testing?

The German file Lithuania already had

On February 11, 2020, the Lithuanian Genocide and Resistance Research Centre told me in a [signed English-language response](#) that the Regional Court in Oldenburg had “exonerated” Hermann Schleef, the former commander of the Šiauliai camp, on April 27, 1970. The [Lithuanian original](#) is preserved separately.

Based on the record I have documented over decades, I do not regard the Lithuanian Genocide and Resistance Research Centre (LGGRTC) as a presumptively reliable historical authority. In my assessment, its publications have repeatedly functioned as instruments of national historical advocacy and, in material instances, as vehicles for distorted or fictionalized history.

Accordingly, I assign no independent evidentiary weight to a historical claim merely because it has been published by the Lithuanian Genocide and Resistance Research Centre. Any material proposition originating with the LGGRTC must be independently verified against primary documentation or credible external historical scholarship before it is relied upon.

Until such verification is obtained, the LGGRTC's assertion is treated as unverified and presumptively unreliable, with particular scrutiny for omission, selective quotation, exculpatory reframing, or factual distortion.

The Oldenburg court did not acquit Schleef and did not make a finding of innocence. The Fourth Criminal Chamber removed him from further prosecution for insufficient evidence. The German prosecutorial memorandum, court order, command chronology and evidence concerning the November 5, 1943 selection at Šiauliai are reproduced in my investigation, [“Lithuania Had the Schleef File.”](#)

In September 2026, Dr. Kerstin Rahn, head of the Oldenburg division of the Lower Saxony State Archive, [confirmed to me that the Schleef records had been transmitted to “the Lithuanian Embassy” in 2021](#). Lithuania therefore possessed the contradictory German primary record within two years of the LGGRTC describing Schleef as exonerated. I have not established the internal custody chain after the file reached the Embassy. That is why I filed a [Foreign Ministry records request](#) rather than pretending the missing routing facts are known.

My September 18 [QES-signed application](#) concerning related LGGRTC descriptions of German judicial proceedings was registered as AP-30803. On September 24, the Vilnius District Prosecutor’s Office [referred it to police for factual clarification](#) before a procedural decision on whether to begin a pre-trial investigation. I then filed a [Schleef supplement](#) asking for the records capable of resolving the custody chain. The referral proves no crime. It does put the unanswered documentary question before an authority capable of obtaining records.

Brazaitis and Škirpa were already public issues

The Schleef issue is not isolated. The surviving American administrative record concerning Juozas Ambrazevičius-Brazaitis contains no judicial acquittal, adjudication of innocence or formal rehabilitation. Brazaitis was not questioned by the investigators before his death. Yet Lithuanian state institutions later used stronger language, including “complete exoneration” and rehabilitation by the United States Department of Justice.

On May 12, 2026, Lithuania’s Foreign Ministry [wrote to U.S. Representative Brad Sherman](#) that the LGGRTC had acknowledged that the “complete exoneration” formulation was legally imprecise and that administrative discontinuation of an investigation is not equivalent to formal judicial exoneration under American law. By then, however, the Brazaitis proposition had already been used as favorable material in the state’s treatment of Kazys Škirpa.

The [Seimas Human Rights Committee’s September 22, 2026 response](#) reproduces the earlier oversight record in which LGGRTC acknowledged relying on favorable circumstances that were not stated in its published Škirpa conclusion. One was the supposed American “complete exoneration” of Brazaitis. Another was Škirpa’s decades of residence in the United States without accusation. In that

underlying record, the Seimas Ombudsmen's Office found a transparency failure in the Centre's handling of the matter.

On September 24, I transmitted revised QES-signed Brazaitis and Škirpa submissions to Lithuania's IHRA delegation. The revisions do not ask IHRA to invent criminal verdicts. They ask whether the state's source use, attribution, correction practice and rehabilitation methodology can withstand documentary testing.

On September 24, as the Foreign Ministry publicized Budrys's "zero tolerance" message from the New York meeting, a Lithuanian prosecutor [declined to begin pre-trial investigations in the Škirpa and Brazaitis matters](#), treating the disputed LGGRTC texts within the criminal-law context as historians' evaluations and opinions. That procedural refusal is part of the record. It is not a historical adjudication that the disputed "exoneration" proposition was accurate, nor does it erase the separate transparency and source-method questions now presented to IHRA.

This institutional concern also predates my 2026 filings. In [2019, IHRA expert leadership publicly objected](#) to LGGRTC's treatment of Jonas Noreika and described the text as part of a series of attempts to rehabilitate his reputation. The statement was not an IHRA Plenary ruling. But its signatories included the then IHRA Chair and its Honorary Chair, and it placed the same Lithuanian state institution on public notice years before these 2026 photographs.

The photographs cannot do the evidentiary work

Lithuania is entitled to meet Jewish organizations. Jewish organizations are entitled to meet Lithuania. What neither side is entitled to do is treat the resulting photograph as an answer to the documentary record.

The government gets something tangible from the image: Jewish institutional proximity. The picture can be circulated without showing a transcript, a challenge, a correction demand or a concession. It can imply that relations are normal, that difficult historical questions have been responsibly managed, and that Lithuania is a credible partner in Holocaust remembrance. That is why saying "it was only a meeting" is not enough. Lithuania itself makes the meeting public and uses the image.

A Jewish participant therefore has a corresponding responsibility. That does not require agreement with me, adoption of my terminology, or refusal to meet Lithuanian officials. It requires knowing the record before allowing one's name, face and institution to become part of the government's presentation of itself.

That is especially true where the organizations already knew the issue. AJC's own 2019 warning said ignorance was no longer available. WJC called the state institution's work Holocaust revisionism. If representatives of such organizations later appear in Lithuanian government photographs about "historical memory," they should be able to say what changed, what was corrected, and what they verified before lending their presence to the new presentation.

Would their donors recognize this as the mission?

There is another constituency entitled to an answer: the people who built and fund these Jewish institutions. Would the legacy donors who created organizations to defend Jewish interests and preserve Holocaust memory have supported meetings that Lithuania can deploy as legitimating or exculpatory imagery while documented disputes over Holocaust distortion and rehabilitation remain unresolved? Current donors are equally entitled to know how their organizations' names, leadership and Jewish standing are being used, and what scrutiny preceded that use.

As a descendant of Holocaust victims, I do not believe these institutions serve the interests of our families merely by appearing at meetings about antisemitism and Holocaust remembrance. Service requires due diligence, confrontation with documented distortion, demands for correction, and resistance to the use of Jewish institutional standing as a substitute for historical accountability.

Why should that burden fall on individual Jews and descendants at all? Major Jewish organizations are the institutions with the access, staff, donor support and public standing to test Lithuania's representations before lending their names and faces to these meetings. Yet Lithuania receives the institutional access, the photographs and the reputational association it wants, while descendants are left to police the historical record from outside the room. If those organizations are not themselves testing the evidence, demanding corrections and defending the integrity of Holocaust memory, what function are they serving in these encounters? Is the Holocaust disposable when historical accountability becomes inconvenient to diplomacy? I should not have to act as an unpaid compliance department for institutions whose missions invoke Jewish memory and Jewish interests while their presence can be used to soften scrutiny of documented Holocaust revisionism.

If they performed that work, they should say so; if they did not, they should explain why. The controversy was not hidden. The IHRA submissions were public, and [hundreds of public articles and documents](#) concerning Lithuania's Holocaust-history policy were readily available. For the May 1 meeting, there was public notice directed specifically at AJC. Minimal due diligence did not require discovering a secret archive. It required looking.

For AJC, which is identifiable in the Los Angeles record, I have not identified a public account addressing the Brazaitis, Škirpa, Schleef or broader LGGRTC documentary problems raised here. That is narrower than saying AJC has raised no Jewish concern with Lithuania. The Ministry's September account says the Šnapiškės cemetery was discussed with the still-unidentified New York participants. Those organizations cannot fairly be tested against these specific records until the Ministry names them. Once they are identified, the question will be whether they confronted these historical files, what Lithuania answered, and what they reported back to their members and donors.

That also raises a mission question. An organization that invokes Holocaust remembrance, Jewish advocacy or protection of Jewish communities as part of its institutional purpose should be able to explain what it does when confronted with documented allegations that a government is rewriting the history of the murdered Jews whose memory that organization claims to defend.

Mission statements and donor trust carry consequences; Holocaust remembrance carries obligations. Legacy donors deserve to know whether the institutions they built would regard this conduct as faithful to their purposes. Current donors should also know what is being done in their names. Descendants of Lithuania's murdered Jews deserve more than another photograph.

A partial correction proves correction is possible

On September 24, Lithuania's Foreign Ministry amended its September 23 Paneriai commemoration page after I [documented that the original text omitted the local shooters](#). The amendment added "local collaborators." That was a partial correction: it added a category of perpetrator but still did not name Lithuanians. I do not claim my article caused the amendment. I do claim the amendment demonstrates that the Ministry can change its public Holocaust language when confronted with an omission.

That makes the photo-op problem worse, not better. Lithuania can rectify wording. The harder question is whether it rectifies conduct and historical method, or whether Jewish institutional photographs allow the state to advertise partnership while deeper documented disputes remain unresolved.

On September 24, I filed a [formal bilingual request to Lithuania's IHRA delegation](#) asking it to transmit the documentary complaint into IHRA's internal structure. Transmission would not constitute endorsement. Lithuania can contest every allegation and inference. That is the point: documents should be tested. IHRA's [Working Definition of Holocaust Denial and Distortion](#), its [Statement on Rehabilitation](#) and the [2020 Ministerial Declaration](#) provide standards against which the record can be examined.

Who did they represent?

When the Foreign Ministry identifies the New York participants, each organization should be able to answer a simple set of questions. What due diligence did you perform before the meeting? Who performed it? What sources did you review? Did you examine the public IHRA filings? Did you review your own organization's prior statements about Lithuania? Did you ask whether earlier correction demands had been satisfied? What did Lithuania tell you, and what did you independently verify?

There is also a question of mandate. Whose concerns did the Jewish representatives carry into that room? A Jewish organization meeting a government about Holocaust remembrance is not merely another diplomatic guest. Its Jewish identity is part of why the government wants the meeting and part of why the government publishes the photograph. That creates a duty not to allow Jewish standing to become a substitute for historical scrutiny.

Every Jewish representative in these photographs should be prepared to answer to the memory of Lithuania's Holocaust victims. A photograph cannot confer legitimacy, even when Lithuania wields it as if it can. The people whose presence gives the image political and reputational value have a responsibility to know how it may be used, and to know the record before they pose.