



LATVIJAS REPUBLIKAS ĀRLIETU MINISTRIJA

MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS OF THE REPUBLIC OF LATVIA

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European Shoah Legacy Institute
Žižkov 155
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Czech Republic

Riga, 18 September 2015
No 37/325- ~~3771~~

Dear Ms. Senyk,

Referring to your letter of 3 August 2015 in which you request to provide you with very specific data regarding immobile property restitution and compensation regime in Latvia, I would like to reassure that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has already provided you with all available information at our disposal.

As noted in our previous communication on this subject, in connection with the *“Guidelines and Best Practices for the Restitution and Compensation of Immovable (Real) Property Confiscated or Otherwise Wrongfully Seized by the Nazis, Fascists and Their Collaborators during the Holocaust (Shoah) Era”* that all immovable property, including that belonging to the Latvian Jewish community, in Latvia’s case was confiscated by the Soviet regime in (1940-1941), then taken over by Nazi regime (1941-1945), and seized again by Soviet authorities (1945-1991).

After renewal of independence in 1991, Latvia has addressed the issue of restitution of immovable property confiscated and nationalized during and after the World War II, including Holocaust-related confiscations, to its rightful owners. Latvia’s restitution legislation was liberal and the legal framework ensured the restitution of real estate properties regardless of the current citizenship and place of residence of a previous owner or heir. Thus in the framework of denationalization process private properties were returned to all persons with a rightful claim.

According to the restitution-related legislation, properties were returned to all persons with a rightful claim, without any discrimination and without singling out any ethnic or social group. Therefore, the determination of the exact numbers on the property returned to private claimants of Jewish origin is impossible. However, it is a credible assumption that a significant part of the private property claims and decisions on the return of property involved claimants of Jewish origin from all around the world.

The restitution process under existing legislation has been completed in 2006. Currently we are undergoing the last and the most complicated phase of the process – restitution of heirless communal and private property. The draft law was introduced in the Parliament on 29 January 2015 and was submitted to the Foreign Affairs Committee for further consideration. On 16 September the Committee voted to submit the draft Law for the first reading. In addition, since 1991 ownership of *more than 30* communal and religious real

estate properties have been already renewed to the Latvian Jewish community.

As a country which has suffered multiple occupations during and after the World War II, Latvian authorities have consistently condemned all totalitarian ideologies and the crimes against humanity and war crimes committed during the World War II. Latvia has carried out restitution of private properties to their rightful owners and Latvia's government consistently continues to cooperate with the Jewish community in Latvia regarding the last phase of the restitution process.

Furthermore, I would like to note that Latvia fully supports the ideas expressed in the Terezin Declaration. As a participant of Prague Conference in 2009 Latvia showed its political will and endorsed the Declaration. Nevertheless, in the spirit of good cooperation allow me to refer to the legally non-binding nature of the Declaration that implies no obligations to its supporters, neither establishes any monitoring mechanisms on restitution of the immovable property in a particular country. Instead, it is aimed to share best practices and develop guidelines, as historic situation, legal systems and chronology of the events differ from country to country. Taking into the account specific historic and legal circumstances, let me reconfirm Latvia's commitment to follow the recommendations given in the Declaration and Guidelines documents with due regard for relevant national laws and regulations as well as international agreements.

In conclusion, I seize this opportunity to express our appreciation for the work of the European Shoah Legacy Institute which was created as a voluntary forum to follow up on the work of the Prague Conference and the Terezin Declaration.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, consisting of a series of fluid, overlapping strokes that form the name 'Eduards Stiprais'.

Eduards Stiprais

Under-Secretary of State, Political Director

Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Latvia