Lithuanian hypocrisy

In recent years, the government of Lithuania has been making considerable efforts to improve the country’s image in Israeli public opinion. The discussions in Jerusalem were part of this attempt, which is entirely fraudulent and deceptive.

Last week I was caught in a debate with myself: whether or not to appear, despite the feeling of nausea, in a discussion with Lithuanian historians, writers and poets at the International Book Fair in Jerusalem. The idea made me so sick that in the end I decided to stay away and I also convinced my friend, former parliamentarian and former chairman of the Yachad party, Yitzhak Arad, to excuse himself from the discussions.

In recent years, the government of Lithuania has been making considerable efforts to improve the country’s image in Israeli public opinion. The discussions in Jerusalem were part of this attempt, which is entirely fraudulent and deceptive. Lithuania’s policy is two-faced. One of the faces is smiling and demonstrating ostensible friendship with Israel. The other is doing all it can to deny the horrors of the Holocaust and harass partisans and Holocaust survivors in Lithuania and Israel.

With utter gall, the Lithuanian prosecutor tried to summon Arad for questioning in 2007, on the grounds that he had committed "war crimes" during World War II. I don’t know what the prosecutor’s father did during the war, but I do know that Arad and I, and many other good people, were partisans and we fought the Nazis and their Lithuanian collaborators. Similar "investigations" are still underway in Lithuania against a number of other partisans.

All this is going on in the context of the "rehabilitation" and the granting of wholesale clemency to Lithuanians who collaborated with the Nazis, a policy that began shortly after Lithuania declared its independence in the early 1990s.

At the end of World War II, when Lithuania was annexed to the Soviet Union, these same collaborators were sent to prison for war crimes. The policy of the post-Soviet Lithuanian government has been to treat the Nazis’ crimes and the "crimes" committed by the Red Army that fought the Nazis and their Lithuanian collaborators as equivalent.
When Lithuanian president Algirdas Brazauskas came to Jerusalem in 1995, I, as a Holocaust survivor, had a bitter argument with him about the sweeping pardons he had granted to tens of thousands of Lithuanians who had murdered Jews, some of whom had even taken over the property of those who were murdered.

In response, Brazauskas delivered a flowery speech in which he said that he bowed his head before the 200,000 Jews of Lithuania who perished in the Holocaust and asked their forgiveness, “for the deeds of those Lithuanians who cruelly killed, shot, deported and robbed.”

In hindsight, it appears these were empty words. The policy of pardons has only accelerated. Its real purpose is to cleanse Lithuanians of their responsibility for the murder of Lithuanian Jewry and thus downplay the Holocaust and its significance.

To my regret, because of their desire to maintain good diplomatic, trade and security relations with Lithuania, the governments of Israel have kept quiet about this policy. Instead of protesting and condemning it and perhaps even lowering the level of diplomatic relations, they fawn over the country.

This ingratitude reached its peak over a decade ago, when the Foreign Ministry agreed that Israeli representatives would participate in committees of historians that would discuss Lithuania during the war. The letter of appointment for the committees was based on a starting point of “equality” between the crimes committed by the Nazis and their Lithuanian collaborators and “the crimes committed by the Soviet Union” after it occupied Lithuania.

Now, the government of Lithuania is trying, by means of its embassy in Israel, to blur and conceal the disgrace with the help of collaborators of a new sort: obsessive intellectuals who came to Israel for discussions that bear no relation at all to intellectual integrity and cultural discourse.

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By Raymond Tantar, Ian Sascha Sheehan | 12:19 PM

When a prime minister plays kingmaker
By Dan Fallenstein | 12:19 PM | 2

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By Amira Hass | 06:38 AM

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By Asaf Prinei | 06:38 AM

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