

Joseph Boski
Political Officer
American Embassy
Akmenų g. 6
LT-03106, Vilnius

21 April 2008

Dear Mr. Boski:

I am sorry to have to write to ask our embassy to take note that for the first time in eight and a half years of happy and tranquil life as a U.S. citizen working in Lithuania, I have felt myself the victim of a threat to my safety.

On 3 April 2008, my executive director and colleague, Prof. Šarūnas Liekis informed me that a draft article I had prepared for the Los Angeles based Board of the Friends of the Vilnius Yiddish Institute had been leaked and that there was fury in some government and/or security circles over the article. The not-for-publication piece, which I have forwarded to you and other colleagues for comments and criticism, is entitled: “Can a Yiddish Tree Grow in Vilnius? (in a time of Holocaust Obfuscation).” In it, I express profound admiration for Lithuania and its people and its democratic institutions, and try to give a rationale for maintaining an international Yiddish studies institute here in Vilnius despite the recent series of antisemitic events which have distressed our international community of supporters. I also express sincere criticism of the state’s Holocaust policies in recent years.

Prof. Liekis thought a lunch with Mr. Ronaldas Račinskas could be constructive, and asked me to prepare some concrete suggestions for the “International Commission for the Evaluation of the Crimes of the Nazi and Soviet Occupation Regimes in Lithuania” of which Mr. Račinskas is executive director. I was happy to do so, and proposed at the lunch, held Thursday 10 April 2008, that the Commission publicly condemn the shameful accusations against Holocaust survivor and anti-Nazi partisan hero Yitzhak Arad; that the Commission publicly call for say half the books of the “Genocide Center” window to relate to the Holocaust; that it call for the antisemitic texts at Gruto parkas to be removed; that the Commission respond meaningfully to the 11 March neo-Nazi march; that the Commission do something to comfort the distraught Holocaust survivors here who are ending their lives in fear and misery as a direct result of the Holocaust Obfuscation policies which (as I see it) have led to an “open season” against survivors. Initiated by the attack on Prof. Arad, after he had been persuaded to join this very Commission to help Lithuania, these attacks have spread in recent months to other anti-Nazi heroes including our institute’s own librarian, Mrs. Fania Brantsovsky, who will turn 86 in May.

I was surprised and shocked during the lunch to find myself a target of several hours of intimidating and threatening behavior by Mr. Račinskas, who accused me of

writing “offensive” material and “uncivilized lies against Lithuania” and assured me that “counter measures” were being taken against me and that I would have to “pay.” His demeanor was thuggish and ominous, and frequently accompanied by antisemitic undertones. I do not recall the exact words which led me to walk out at the end, but they seemed to me to allude to my allegedly being part of some kind of Jewish conspiracy against Lithuania. Although there was no explicit physical threat, I felt that an attempt was being made to make me believe that I would not be safe remaining in Lithuania, where I have worked in peace and tranquility as a professor at Vilnius University since 1 September 1999, with complete dedication to my many excellent Lithuanian students, whom I continue to help and support in every way possible, and of whom I feel so very proud. Many have gone on to join graduate programs in Britain and the United States. My article includes the sentence:

“And there’s the universal humanist spirit that says Let it be Good, at the beautiful sight of young Lithuanians, Jews, Poles, Russians, and others from near and far studying a small and not-very commercially viable culture, together in harmony, voluntarily, in a twenty-first century capital city of the New Europe.”

It is an unhappy irony that the “offending” not-for-publication article that has led to this sad event includes the following text about my life in Lithuania:

“Like other foreigners of various backgrounds, I have been treated splendidly, and have never been made to feel uncomfortable or unwelcome either because of who I am, or for views which differ with some of today’s government policies (any more than I would expect to be in my own country).”

It is sad is that this article has itself resulted in the first (and I hope last) such incident. I would not wish this to be blown out of proportion, I have no interest in this achieving any publicity of any kind, and I certainly have no wish to harm Mr. Račinskas’s political career (though I remain shocked that his demeanor could be so very much at odds with the public persona that I had been acquainted with for years). I wonder whether a simple, short written notice about this complaint from a resident U.S. citizen could perhaps simply be forwarded to the appropriate government office here, which would no doubt be grateful to be informed when an American citizen is treated inappropriately by a government official.

With many thanks for your attention, and hoping that this matter can soon be forgotten,

Yours sincerely,

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