



POLISH AMERICAN CONGRESS

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March 4, 2011

Her Excellency Dalia Grybauskaitė
President
Republic of Lithuania
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Dear Madam President:

The Polish American Congress, an umbrella organization representing more than 10 million persons in the United States who are Polish or of Polish descent, is strongly protesting the discrimination being shown to persons of Polish ethnicity in the Republic of Lithuania.

Please remember that the ethnic Poles in your country are not immigrants who chose to live in Lithuania, but are Poles whose ancestors have lived there for centuries.

On February 16 2011, the Lithuanian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Audronius Ažubalis, currently Chairman-in-Office of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), testified before the Committee for Security and Cooperation in Europe, also known as the U.S. Helsinki Commission, of the U.S. Congress. Among the Minister's statements were these words:

Lithuania is under no illusions about the enormity of the tasks that face us this year. As the OSCE chairperson in office, I plan to focus our attention on specific key outcomes, which we will pursue on a step-by-step basis. Our key goals: register tangible progress in addressing protracted conflicts, significantly improve our record of implementation of media freedom commitments, promote tolerance education throughout the OSCE area in order to combat hate crimes and discrimination...

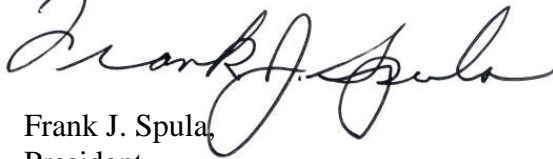
Yet the actions of the Lithuanian government belie these words. Discrimination against the Polish ethnic minority manifests itself, among others, in these ways:

- Elimination of education in the Polish language and closing of Polish-language schools, which have existed in the area for centuries, and which now teach Polish in addition to, not instead of, the national Lithuanian language.

- In contravention of accepted practice and regulations of the European Union, signs in languages other than Lithuanian are banned, even in areas where over 80% of the population speaks the other language. Heavy fines are levied for posting such signs.
- Members of ethnic minorities in Lithuania are denied the right to spell their given and family names in the original form passed down through the generations, but must change the spelling to government-mandated forms.

It should be noted that the attempts to forcefully assimilate the Polish community in Lithuania significantly intensified after Lithuania's accession to NATO and the European Union, in violation of the anti-discriminatory principles, which are the guiding light of these organizations. Therefore, the Polish American Congress calls on the government of Lithuania to live up to these principles and cease the discriminatory actions against the ethnic Polish community.

Respectfully,



Frank J. Spula,
President

Addressees:

H.E. Dalia Grybauskaitė, President, Republic of Lithuania
H.E. Andrius Kubilius, Prime Minister, Republic of Lithuania
H.E. Irena Degutienė, Speaker of the Seimas, Republic of Lithuania
H.E. Valentinas Stundys, Chair, Seimas Committee on Education and Culture
H.E. Audronius Ažubalis, Minister of Foreign Affairs
H.E. Gintaras Steponavičius, Minister of Education and Science

Copies:

H.E. Donald Tusk, Prime Minister, Republic of Poland
Hon. Hilary Rodman Clinton, Secretary of State, United States of America
Hon. Christopher H. Smith, Chairman, U.S. Helsinki Commission
Hon. Benjamin L. Cardin, Co-Chairman, U.S. Helsinki Commission