

Translation from:

<http://www.lrytas.lt/-12886799631286856437-u%C5%B3-ministro-a-a%C5%B3Eubalio-%C4%AF%C5%B3Eeistas-%C5%B3Eydas-litvakas-lietuvos-vald%C5%B3Eiai-ir-nacionalin%C4%97-par-didvyr%C4%97-nepatikima.htm>

Jewish Litvak Offended by Lithuanian Foreign Minister Azubalis: South African Heroine Unreliable, Says Lithuanian Government

Monika Bončkutė, Vladas Krivickas

November 2, 2010

Special to lrytas.lt from Los Angeles



G. Gochin with aunt Barsel at South African prison cell where she was imprisoned. N. Mandela was imprisoned in the next cell. Photo: G. Gochin personal archive

The comments about Jewish lobbyists seeking dual citizenship by Lithuanian foreign minister Audronis Ažubalis, which shamed his colleagues and which he quickly tried to take back, have only confirmed the convictions of Los Angeles-based Litvak Grant Gochin that it's still incomprehensible to the Lithuanian government that a Jew from Lithuania and a Lithuanian could be one and the same thing.

The man who tried unsuccessfully to attain Lithuanian citizenship took the minister's statement personally. He said Azubalis's comments only deepened his lack of confidence in the government of Lithuania and its decisions. "They only strengthened Lithuania's image in the international arena as a country where Jews are not welcome," he said.

Gochin argued if even a minister allows himself to consider not adopting the new Law on Citizenship because it is beneficial to Jews, then no one can say that similar anti-Semitic sentiments do not dominate at the Migration Department, which makes decisions on citizenship questions.

Fighting for Citizenship for Five Years Now

"In the statement in which he negated his earlier comments published in Lietuvos Rytas [lyrtas.lt], the foreign minister continues to make a clear distinction between Lithuanians and 'other ethnicities' such as Jews. Everyone well knows that Jews were long an integral part of Lithuanian society. Making this sort of distinction clearly betrays the type of thinking which can't understand that a Jew can also be a Lithuanian. This attitude is at the heart of many problems," the descendant of Jewish Litvaks who lives in the USA told lyrtas.lt.

[Lrytas.lt](http://lyrtas.lt) has written before about Gochin's five-year continuing effort to get Lithuanian citizenship, which he believes rightfully belongs to him.

Unsatisfied with the decision from the Migration Department, he appealed their decision to the Vilnius District Administrative Court, but the latter at the end of September rejected Gochin's appeal and left the Migration Department decision in force. The Migration Department decision found that the foreigner hadn't submitted sufficient documents demonstrating blood ties with Samuel Gochin, a man born in Lithuania who served in the Independent Lithuanian Military.

South African Heroine's Testimony Fails to Impress Lithuanian Judges

The court threw out the written testimony of Gochin's aunt Esther Barsel, who was born in Raguva [Lithuania] and is a citizen of the Republic of South Africa. Her testimony stated that she personally knew S. Gochin, who died in 1984, and guaranteed that there is no doubt that he was G. Gochin's grandfather.

The decision by the Vilnius District Administrative Court says that although the civil code allows applicants for citizenship to present witness statements as well written evidence, "the statements ... of Esther Barsel ... are not to be considered because the information they contain has not been confirmed by evidence."

Gochin is Really Upset about the Court's Behavior

"E. Barsel is one of the most famous women in SAR. She was imprisoned with SAR apartheid struggler, former president and Nobel Peace Prize laureate Nelson Mandela. She is a national SAR hero, and a museum was established in her honor. She is one of the most famous people to come from Lithuania. Despite that, Lithuanian clerks couldn't be bothered to show any interest in who the person providing this testimony is, and had the gall to say that this woman's testimony is 'unreliable,'" Gochin said angrily.

Just before [her] death in 2008, Barsel attended a private function exclusively for Mandela's closest friends and the personal archive she left to her daughters contains a multitude of photographs which record her and Mandela's conversations.

Does the State of Lithuania Covet Others' Property?

Gochin said the Lithuanian foreign minister's hints that there are supposedly many Jews who want to get Lithuanian citizenship just so they can get back property that rightfully belongs to them is absurd. "If a person wants to get back property that rightfully belongs to him, which was stolen from him, should citizenship even be a crucial factor in this case? Such a policy just shows that Lithuania prefers to keep for itself stolen property and not to let those to whom it belongs get it back," the Lithuanian Jewish descendant living in the USA said.

Gochin said the Migration Department only just recently did away with the

question about the applicant's ethnicity on the citizenship application form. He said that when he approached them to restore his citizenship, ethnicity was a required question. He was told that "American" is not an ethnicity, and was forced to say he was a "Jew."

Ready to Restore Lithuanian Jewish Graves

"The very fact that the Lithuanian government is worried about my religion—because being a Jew is a religious, not an ethnic matter—shows that ethnicity is a significant fact in deciding to whom to bestow Lithuanian citizenship and to whom not to bestow it," Gochin said. He said the Lithuanian government became convinced of the illegality of the question and therefore had it removed from the questionnaire.

"All one can hope for still is that Lithuania will continue to move toward modern thinking," said the Litvak who failed to get Lithuanian citizenship and who was shocked by the statements by Lithuanian foreign minister Azubalis that appeared in the foreign press.

Gochin said he will maintain ties with Lithuania. Currently he is negotiating with Lithuanian government institutions and private organizations on restoring Jewish graveyards in Lithuania. He is prepared to spend his personal funds on this, too. "My goal is to preserve Jewish history in Lithuania. If at the same time I create jobs for a few Lithuanian residents, I will be even happier."