

Grant Arthur Gochin

10900 Winnetka Ave
Chatsworth, CA 91311, USA
Phone: 818-625-4452
E mail: ggochin@gmail.com

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Ambassador Darius Degutis
Embassy of the Republic of Lithuania
Amot Mishpat Bldg.
8 Shaul Hameleh Blvd.
Tel Aviv 64733
Israel

Re: Lithuania and Jews

Mr. Degutis,

Your e mail dated October 31, 2011 was recently shared with me. I attach a copy for your reference. I take exception to some parts of your e mail, and will explain after offering my personal background.

I trace my family all the way into the 1700's in a village called Papile in Akmene District, and likely a few hundred years before that. The last of my surviving family to live in Lithuania was my Grandfather Samuel who left in 1926, and my great grandmother Chaie who left in 1930.

I am certain you are aware of the Jewish deportations of 1915. On May 4, 1915, the Jewish family Gochin, were one of those thousands of families deported. The Gochin family was deported to Melitopol in Ukraine.

On December 26, 1921, Faive Gochin, my great-great Grandfather, who was father of Avram Gochin, submitted an application to the Lithuanian authorities to allow his son and family to return to Lithuania from their exile in Ukraine. (Lithuanian State Central Archive _LCVA, Fund 412, Inventory 13, File 6 Page 857, Application By Faive Gochin, 26 Dec 1921.)

The Papile vital records had been destroyed during the WW1, and so Faive had to prove that his progeny were his progeny, and that they were Lithuanian. Individual family testimonies were offered, the Papile Jewish Community also supplied testimony that the Gochin family and children had been born in Papile, the application files were

thoroughly documented. On February 28, 1922, the Council of Papile wrote to the Head of the District confirming that there were no reasons why the Gochin family should not be allowed to return to Lithuania.

On March 28, 1922, the Lithuanian Department of Citizen's Security, in a brief to the Head of the Shavel District, overturned the District findings and ruled that the Gochin family was not to be allowed to return to Lithuania, stating that they lacked the documents to prove they were Lithuanian, and thus excluding these Jewish Survivors from return.

If you have studied this period, you will know the absolute trauma suffered by the victims of this deportation, and what such a denial would have done to a family. This was a deliberate act by a Lithuanian Government Official.

The consequences of this decision were disastrous for the Gochin family. Avram died of starvation in March of 1922, three of his and his wife Chaie's children: Leya, Tsipa and Edel all died of either disease or starvation in 1922, as did Tsipa's husband, one of their children, and Leya's two children – i.e. we can show that (at least) 8 members of my family died of starvation as a result of delays in their repatriation. We do not have records on Leya's husband nor any of the other children.

In 1917, Avram and Chaie's son Samuel (my Grandfather) had been abducted and taken into the Byelorussian army in order to fight their war; a war in which Jews would be victimized no matter which side won. After all, a Jewish child's life had no value to the authorities, and if that Jewish child's body could absorb even one enemy bullet, it served their purpose. Fortunately, my Grandfather Sam survived.

On 27 September 1922, Chaie took her surviving children and grandchildren to the Obeliai border crossing, completed her re-entry paperwork, proved her Lithuanian citizenship and was allowed to re-enter Lithuania. (LCVA.F. 412. In. 13. File 13 L. 469.)

The town of Papile had been destroyed in the war, and the Gochin family had to re-build their lives. In 1924, Samuel, having survived the Ukrainian military was then conscripted into the Lithuanian army. Having endured starvation and illness in Ukraine, Sam was still physically weak, and on 6 June, 1924, Lithuanian military doctors recommended that he be released from service due to his physical condition. (LCVA. F. 1102. In.1. File.854.P.6, 6ap.7). Lithuanian military officials declined, and forced him to serve all 18 months that they required. My Grandfather completed his military service in 1925, and in 1926 he left Lithuania for South Africa. In 1930, his Mother, Chaie, sister Esther, and nephew Max also emigrated to South Africa. You are well aware of what happened to 96.4% of Jews that remained behind in Lithuania.

In South Africa, my Grandfather Sam taught me only the positives of the "Old Country", he never once spoke badly of Lithuania, and idealized his youth. In 2004, I decided to apply for citizenship in Lithuania, to regain the historical ties and an enduring legacy of history to the place of my ancestors. My intention was to teach our family legacy to my

son, with a sense of history and heritage, just as my Grandfather had given to me. As you may be aware, Lithuania permitted dual citizenship at that time.

My first visit to the Lithuanian Consul was shocking to me, when it was required that I state my nationality as “Jew”. That was based upon the “National” concept of population in Lithuania at that time, but it was most disturbing to be defined by religious affiliation. That single act set the tone for all that was to follow. At that time, I believed Lithuania had changed and had warmed to Jews.

Under Lithuanian law, the Migration Department of the Lithuanian Government is required to respond in 6 months, and so they did, every six months coming up with different data requests, almost three years of delays later, the Lithuanian Supreme Court ruled that dual citizenship was no longer allowed, and within a few days of that decision, the Lithuanian Government finally came to the determination that I was not eligible, as dual citizenship was no longer allowed, and they stated, exactly as they had to Chaie in 1922, that I lacked the documents to prove my Grandfather had been Lithuanian.

Combining the repeated delays with the response coming so soon after the Supreme Court decision, and the fact that I had been mandated to identify my Nationality as “Jew”, was more than ample evidence that the decision related to being a “Jew”.

Their decision appeared very deliberate in that after so many years of delays and obfuscations, the moment they had the opportunity to deny Citizenship based on the new ruling, they then finally took their decision. As you are also aware, there is only a 30 day window to appeal the MD decisions. That decision was released to me with only a few days of that window remaining, again, an apparent deliberate attempt to deny me my right to appeal.

I was absolutely outraged. You can read some of the newspaper articles that followed on my blog at <http://ggochin.wordpress.com/> I filed a legal action against the Lithuanian Government.

The following listing are Lithuanian references to all five court decisions that followed the denial.

1. Civiline byla Nr. 2-1396-553/08. Procesinio sprendimo kategorija: 117.1.;118.1.;
2. Administracine byla Nr. I-2369-426/2008. Procesinio sprendimo kategorija 3.5; 74
3. Administracine byla Nr. I=1548-171/2010. Proceso Nr. 3-61-3-00719-2010-3. Procesinio sprendimo kategorija 3.5; 74
4. Administracine byla Nr. A822-2124/2011. Teisminio proceso Nr. 3-61-3-00719-2010-3. Procesinio sprendimo kategorija 3.5; 79.1

5. Administracine byla Nr. I=1548-171/2010. Teisminio proceso Nr. 3-61-3-00719-2010-3. Procesinio sprendimo kategorija 59; 73.

These rulings speak for themselves. The sheer dishonesty of the Migration Department is mind numbing. I had hoped to expose the Migration Department in a Court of Law where I intended to make them explain their actions in front of an impartial Judge. At that time I was still unaware that Courts in Lithuania are not known for independence, but rather, have a reputation for following dictates of the Government. The Courts validated the Government positions until my case reached the Lithuanian Supreme Court.

My agenda in litigating was not to win anything tangible, it was to force the Government (in this case the Migration Department) to tell the truth. As you can see, that was not to be. Their conjuring up “possible” beings with the same names, or stating that military historians were lying, that independent testimony was not credible, and all their other fallacious defenses were mind opening for me. That Courts validated truly absurd arguments showed me that the Courts had no agenda in truth, but were there only to validate Government positions in rejecting Jewish applications. This was validated for me by Lithuanian Government employees that told me confidentially that Migration Department did not want to grant Jewish applications for fear of changing the “National Character” of Lithuania as presently constituted, or that the Lithuanian Government feared Jewish property claims if heritage was recognized. I have difficulty understanding that the law is based upon denial of truth in order to avoid property claims. Should that be an issue, that shows the Lithuanian Courts are truly “Kangaroo Courts” as asserted by so many.

On July 22, 2011, 89 years after Lithuania denied my Great Grandmother Chaie’s citizenship, Lithuania’s Supreme Court required that the Government re-examine my application and issue a new decision. These new decisions are usually issued after 30 days, in my case, MD took over 3 months to respond.

Now having received the “Certificate of Right of Retention to Lithuanian Citizenship” I recognize the six year battle with Lithuanian Authorities in their resistance to recognize my heritage. What started for me with the “Jew” Nationality has shown me irrevocably what my family would have endured when they were powerless to stand up to the Government of Lithuania, and there was no media or EU oversight. I can only respond with sadness that the positive lessons my Grandfather taught me about Lithuania, were and are just not reality. Having had such extensive personal interaction with the Lithuanian State, I can only now state that positive statements by Lithuanian officials should not be accepted as sincere by any Jew. Such is my personal background and experience, now I refer to statements in your e mail.

I just watched a very interesting film “From the Ashes. The New Beginning” about the history and life of South African Jewish community which in its overwhelming majority has roots in Lithuania. – The Lithuanian Government is well aware that between 70-

90% of South African Jews have origin in Lithuania. Therefore, Lithuania knows that in receiving an application from a South African Jew showing Lithuanian documents, there is very little doubt that they actually do have Lithuanian roots. Therefore, the manner in which Lithuania opposed me can only be taken as Jew hate, I find no other possible explanation.

Despite the tragic history of the World War II, the atrocities of the Holocaust which we shall never forget, Lithuanian Government is particularly dedicated to restoring and preserving the exceptional Lithuanian Jewish cultural, religious and communal heritage, to remembering and commemorating the memory of those perished in the Holocaust. – It is well known that 96.4% of Jews in the territory of Lithuania were murdered during the Shoah, this with the voluntary, enthusiastic participation of segments of the Lithuanian Community, and indifference of the vast majority of the remainder. Including those that were deported to Siberia before the Shoah, the survival rate for Jews was about 5%. Therefore, virtually the only surviving Lithuanian Jews are those that left prior to the Shoah, such as my Grandfather. The descendants of those that left Lithuania voluntarily before 1940 are now excluded from dual citizenship, this conveniently excludes Jews, because the survival rate for Jews that did not voluntarily leave, was almost nil. Lithuania has achieved a Judenrein status without having to define it as such. Given the narrow drafting of dual citizenship laws, one can only interpret the design to be the intent to exclude Jews from citizenship. Therefore, I cannot give credibility to the Lithuanian Governments statements about mourning Jews when Seimas has taken such efforts to exclude Jews from citizenship.

2011 is proclaimed by the Lithuanian Government as the Year of Remembrance of Holocaust Victims. – This name was stated and then it was changed very shortly thereafter. I find the presentation of this title to be less than forthcoming, and very tailored to your intended audience.

Despite the effects of the global economic crisis and severe austerity measures Lithuanian Parliament earlier this year has passed the Law on Compensation for the Property of Jewish religious Communities allocating 53 million USD for this purpose. – You state this as if it was voluntary and complete. Seimas was under great pressure to settle, and did so for the lowest possible amount. This should not be presented as if Seimas wanted to create a positive outreach.

reconstructing and protecting the famous Jewish Shnipiskes cemetery in the Center of Vilnius – I am horrified that you would present this as if it was a positive for Lithuania. This was done after great pressure from the USA Congress, there was nothing voluntary about Lithuania's actions. Presenting this in such a format removes credibility of your statements.

We look forward to our future cooperation in bringing closer Lithuania and South Africa. – Sir, this is a warm and friendly statement, but it is obvious from my own case that Lithuania welcomes Jewish tourist Dollars, not actual Jews.

I am much saddened that I can only turn my back on Lithuania. I wish you well in your endeavors and hope that your efforts will eventually bear fruit in renewing ties between Jews and Lithuanians. Unfortunately I can only speak out to other Jews of South African origin, to tell them of my own experiences and forewarn them that Lithuania only wishes their tourist Dollars, living Jews are very obviously unwelcome.

Yours sincerely,

Grant Arthur Gochin.

CC:.

Ambassador Pavilionis
Embassy of Lithuania
2622 16th Street, NW,
Washington, DC 20009
USA

Honorary Consul Daiva Navarrette
2806 Santa Monica Blvd.
Santa Monica, CA 90404, USA

Raymond Joffe
Honorary Consul of Lithuania
1st Floor, Killarney Mall,
60 Riviera Road,
Killarney, 2193
South Africa

Alan B. Schmiedt
Honorary Consul of Lithuania
P O Box 596
Cape Town
8000 South Africa

Ivor Feinberg
Honorary Consul of Lithuania
6th Floor
28 Church Square
Pretoria 0002
South Africa

E mail from Ambassador Degutis dated October 31, 2011

<http://www.spiritsister.co.za/documentaries.php>

In 5 parts, each about 9 minutes

From: Darius DEGUTIS

Dear Sirs,

I am Lithuanian Ambassador in Israel and I am also accredited to South Africa (as a cross country, non-resident Ambassador). I just watched a very interesting film "From the Ashes. The New Beginning" about the history and life of South African Jewish community which in its overwhelming majority has roots in Lithuania. I would like to thank SABC, the producer and director of the film Heather Blumenthal for telling this story of the unique South African Jewish community which is so closely related to Lithuania. As an Ambassador to South Africa I am visiting your wonderful country few times a year and during my visits I have met and acquired many new friends representing local Jewish community. It is indeed an amazing community and I am very happy that they are so much engaged in rediscovering Lithuania as the Homeland of their ancestors.

We at the Embassy are always more than happy to extend our support and assistance to those willing to learn more about Lithuania, to visit our country and to rebuild bridges with Lithuania.

Despite the tragic history of the World War II, the atrocities of the Holocaust which we shall never forget, Lithuanian Government is particularly dedicated to restoring and preserving the exceptional Lithuanian Jewish cultural, religious and communal heritage, to remembering and commemorating the memory of those perished in the Holocaust.

2011 is proclaimed by the Lithuanian Government as the Year of Remembrance of Holocaust Victims. The special program covering all Lithuania and comprising of 25 National Holocaust Victims Remembrance projects is being implemented. Despite the effects of the global economic crisis and severe austerity measures Lithuanian Parliament earlier this year has passed the Law on Compensation for the Property of Jewish religious Communities allocating 53 million USD for this purpose. The Government has just recently passed a decision to appropriate almost 200 000 euros for setting up the Jewish library in Vilnius. The Government adopted a special resolution for restoring the historic Jewish Quarter in the Old City of Vilnius, reconstructing and protecting the famous Jewish Shnipiskes cemetery in the Center of Vilnius. Just a few months ago, in close cooperation with Yad Vashem and Washington Holocaust Memorial Museum, the Government initiated reconstruction of Paneriai Memorial, the major site of the atrocities during the Shoah. Most recently, in July, Prime Minister himself commenced the excavation of the world famous Great Vilnius Synagogue built in 1572 and demolished by the Soviets in 1957. These are just few latest examples of the undertakings of the Lithuanian Government. We look forward to our future cooperation in bringing closer Lithuania and South Africa.

Sincerely,
Darius Degutis
Ambassador