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## Minister: A Common History Unites and Embitters Relations with Poles and Jews

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A common history both unites and separates Lithuanians and Poles and Jews, Lithuanian foreign minister Vygaudas Usackas admits. Relations with Poles are hindered by talk of ethnic minority problems, stereotypes and uncompleted infrastructure projects. Smooth relations with Jews are disturbed by the fact that the Nazi regime has been condemned universally, but Soviet repression still hasn't.

The top Lithuanian diplomat called discussions of pragmatism and values in foreign policy artificial, claiming the one is intimately connected with the other.

Usackas made the statements Wednesday delivering a lecture at the International Relations and Political Science Institute of Vilnius University.

### **Values and Pragmatism: Two Sides of the Same Coin**

“Lately there has been much talk about the choice between pragmatic and values-based foreign policy. This discussions sometimes detours into calls for paying more attention to our own pragmatic interests, instead of values. Or vice-versa: to ignore specific economic interests, refusing cooperation with neighboring states,” the minister said. “This discussions appears artificial to me. Values-based and pragmatic policies are different sides of the same coin. I am convinced that successful foreign policy should mean, first of all, ensuring national interests. And these national interests derive from giving purpose to our values as much as the satisfaction of material needs.”

Usackas said that our country's foreign policy has "a clear values orientation, we value freedom, democracy, human rights and fairness." These values "helped us survive and restore independence, achieve EU and NATO membership," and are the basis for our relations with neighbors and partners in current foreign policy.

"Our aspiration to live in a safe and stable neighborhood is just as much an important pragmatic security interest as it is a values-based conviction that security and stability can best be assured through principles of democracy, of respect for human rights and freedoms and of the free market. It is impossible to oppose national interests and values, because the preservation of values is also a national interest," he said.

### **"Need to talk with Russia"**

The minister called Russian relations dynamic. "One needs to speak with Russia," he said. "We well know from our experience that Russia is an important but complicated neighbor. But if we want to speak, including on the issue of restitution for damage from the USSR occupation, channels of communication are required, which practically haven't existed over the last several years. After a long pause we are renewing them, ties with different institutions are becoming active, not just with the foreign ministry, but also customs and transportation. We have shown that we can work with Russia, to strengthen constructive ties without renouncing our values or principles of historical justice."

Usackas said the expansion of political dialogue with Moscow and the strengthening of ties in the areas of economics, culture, sport and tourism "can't be used as cover for influencing Lithuania's internal politics as we saw this weekend during the founding of one of the political parties."

And cooperation with Poland has been deeply distorted not just by the problems of ethnic minorities dominating publicly and current stereotypes about one another in both countries, but also by still uncompleted transportation and energy projects. "Solidarity and commonality need to influence our relations today rather than stereotypes from the beginning of the 20th century," he said.

## **Appeals to Jewish History**

Next week Usackas will visit Israel and Palestine. This will be the first visit by a member of the government to the latter territory. Our country supports the peace process, has spoken for two states living peacefully next to one another, has called for an end to acts of terror and has welcomed Israel's steps to stop the construction of settlements.

The minister said special ties bind Jews and Lithuanians, that they lived peacefully alongside one another for 600 years in one country, which is known by many Jews as Lita and whose capital Vilnius is called Jerusalem of Lithuania. But during the Nazi occupation, when some Lithuanians risked their lives and saved Jews, others attacked Jews.

He said that people born after World War II can't be implicated in the Holocaust, but that the question always needs to be asked: "Historical truth and justice is called for not just by the sacred memory of the victims of the Holocaust. This is needed not so much and not just by Jews, but first of all by us, the citizens of contemporary, free, modern and democratic Lithuania."

Commenting on discussions equating Nazism and Communism, Usackas said "to equate separate phenomena, criminal regimes, is impossible." Lithuania suffered from both, but civilized humanity universally condemned the crimes of the Nazis a long time ago, whereas the memory of the Soviet victims was neither morally nor legally assessed for a long time: "The uncensored history of the states and nations of Eastern and Central Europe was taboo for a long time even in the very states that had suffered from Stalinism. So one shouldn't be surprised that so much misunderstanding and tension arise, when facts that were kept quiet earlier change one or another interpretation of history that has taken root in society."

Because it was not just Lithuanians but also Lithuanian Jews, Russians and other ethnicities who experienced historical loss during the period of Stalinism, Usackas said he hoped that Israel and the Jewish nation will understand and support efforts to honor the memory of all victims of Stalinism in common, to restore historical memory.

## **Lithuania, a Shareholder in EU Intellectual Property?**

The minister said little states need friends, and that to make use of the opportunities offered by EU and NATO membership, we must insure the largest [possible] support by Western states. “We must take a much more active part in adopting EU decisions. My goal is [that we] become real shareholders in the intellectual property of the common EU foreign and security policy. Not merely to participate in discussions and meetings voting yes or no, but so that we would become the co-authors of intellectual ideas and initiatives.” To accomplish that, Usackas suggests we ourselves offer suggestions and express opinions not just on matters of importance to us, but also on the expansion of a US/EU dialogue and EU action in Afghanistan and the Middle East.

He said EU and NATO states were primarily interested in Lithuania’s experience and recommendations concerning countries with which we have a historical past, and cultural and business contacts. He said small member states in the bloc will have to specialize in niche projects, and that “it is natural that our EU partners expect a further active role in formulating and implementing EU policy regarding Eastern partners, Russia and Central Asia.”

Among the results achieved by the Community, Usackas said that the number of states “disregarding the territorial integrity of Georgia” is no longer growing, and cited the decision to begin dialogue with Belarus on easing visa restrictions, an acceleration of political partnership with the East, swift financial and political aid to Moldova and financial support for connecting the electricity systems of Sweden and the Baltic states.

### **Criticizes Protectionism**

The minister said that with the budget allocated for financing balances of payments for EU members without the euro increased from 16 to 50 billion euros (Latvia, Hungary and Romania are already using this support), priorities in economics need to be changed quickly, there needs to be an orientation toward sectors generating higher added value, the industrial base needs to be strengthened and the service sector needs to be modernized. He said it became evident during the crisis that the euro provides stability and stability [two synonyms used], and that therefore the prospect of introducing a common EU currency should become the axis of macroeconomic policy and structural reforms.

Usackas warned that we won't [be able to] create a competitive Lithuania through EU aid alone. "It is necessary to create a favorable and respectful attitude by society toward business activity and business people, especially now, during a time of economic hardships."

"Only a state open to ideas, investments and trade can navigate successfully in the global seas," the minister said, meaning [sic] globalization. He suggested supporting free trade and opposing protectionism because Lithuania is a country of merchants (in 2008 foreign trade volume comprised 116 percent [sic] of GDP).

Usackas said he wishes the interests of Lithuanian exporters were more varied and that they would express themselves more broadly, not just in so-called traditional markets. He cited current trade and investment missions to Algeria, Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan, Georgia, India and Nigeria, and that investment opportunities were presented recently to more than a hundred investors from the City of London. Similar travels are planned next year to the USA, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates.