

Transcaucasus shadow looms over Lithuania

by Mark Burdman

In a Jan. 15 discussion with *EIR*, a Lithuanian political insider close to the Lithuanian Popular Front Sajudis organization affirmed that, from the standpoint of what Lithuanians hoped to achieve from the Jan. 11-13 visit of Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachov to Lithuania, and vis-à-vis the issues facing the Baltic republic *as such*, the visit was a success. However, he strongly cautioned, what is now unfolding in the Transcaucasus is of great concern for Lithuania, since the Soviet intervention there "sets a precedent" for what might later be done in the Baltic. Lithuanians expect that such military action could come at any moment.

According to this individual, "Gorbachov has now been told, and re-told, that the Lithuanian Communist Party decision to split from the Soviet Communist Party stays, and he's had to accept the fact. The Lithuanian Communist Party is now separated from the Soviet Communist Party."

Furthermore, he said, "a statement was extracted from Gorbachov, with application that is Soviet Union-wide, that a multi-party system is not detrimental to the U.S.S.R."

He added: "Lithuanians I spoke to on the last day of Gorbachov's stay, told me they are now already assuming that Lithuania is independent. They are leading a normal life. They want to get the Russian troops out, they want to restore the environment, and they are sending delegations around the world to discuss what to do with the economy. They are very pleased with what they have achieved."

He stressed, however, that exactly as the Gorbachov trip was concluding, the Transcaucasus crisis was again exploding, triggered by large-scale pogroms in Baku, Azerbaijan's capital. This has some very worrying implications for the Baltic republics.

"The Soviets are sending troops into the Transcaucasus. Notice that the West is not only not protesting, but is supporting the idea. That sets a precedent. In the future, what is to stop Moscow from claiming that a similar situation exists in the Baltic, and requires similar action? How will the West respond?" he asked.

Soviet provocations in the Baltic

This source warned that the Soviet KGB and its assets might try to create a Transcaucasus-like situation in Lithuania. "Maybe they could start a rebellious movement among a minority of Poles living in Vilnius [Lithuania's capital], who would agitate for the 'return of Vilnius' to the Poles. Vilnius could then become the 'Nagorno-Karabakh' of the Baltic."

It should be recalled that one year after the Soviets annexed eastern Poland in the context of the 1939 Hitler-Stalin Pact agreements, Vilnius was transferred to Soviet Lithuania. Soon after, Lithuania itself was annexed illegally by Moscow. The city of Vilnius has had a complicated history. Although not now claimed by Poland, it is regarded by Poles, historically and culturally, as a Polish city. There is also a significant Polish minority now living in Vilnius.

"If anybody wants to create a similar situation to that between Azerbaijan and Armenia, there is material there that can be picked up and the flames can be rekindled," he stressed. "Some day, I can see Lithuanians searching for Poles, and Poles searching for Lithuanians."

He said the Vatican was boxed-in in its search for a resolution between these two Catholic populations. From a Catholic standpoint, Vilnius is still officially in the Polish Catholic diocese, and any change of that would have to be negotiated via Moscow, unless the Holy See were prepared to recognize Lithuanian independence as such, in defiance of Moscow, which is highly unlikely. Such complications have contributed to the fact that the Pope has held back from deciding to visit Lithuania, this Lithuanian source claimed.

He also affirmed that, for the other Baltic republics, Latvia and Estonia, the situation was even more problematic, because of the larger percentage of ethnic Russians living there, who can easily be whipped up by Moscow.

West undermines independence drive

Another factor that causes concern among Lithuanian patriots, is the attitude of Western leaders, typified by British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher. "Thatcher and people who think like her, believe that the Lithuanians are naughty boys, that they are hurting Gorbachov's perestroika. They think what the Lithuanians are doing, is both a harassment and an embarrassment."

He pointed to the recent decision by the British House of Commons and by British Home Secretary David Waddington, for holding "war crimes trials" at the earliest possible date in Britain, to put on trial a handful of octogenarians from the Baltic republics, who are accused of having collaborated with the Nazis and of having committed war crimes during World War II. Many, if not most, of the targeted individuals are Lithuanians. This campaign is being used to blacken the reputation of Lithuanians, and can only aid and abet Moscow's attempts to undermine the Lithuanians' campaign for independence and sovereignty.