

His Excellency
Mr. Vytautas Landsbergis
President of the Republic
VILNIUS
Lithuania

London, 8 September 1991

Dear Mr. President,

Please accept my and my family's most heartfelt congratulations on the occasion of Lithuania's return to the family of free European countries.

I had the pleasure of being introduced to you and Mrs. Landsbergis at the reception given at the Lithuanian Club on the occasion of your visit to London.

My family's ties with Lithuania date back to the mid-19th century, when my great-great grandfather received, by way of recognition for his exploits in Russia's wars against Napoleon, a grant of formerly Polish Crown lands near Yurbarkas. Ever since, we had regarded Lithuania as our second homeland, which my late father went on to serve, in the days of the Russian Empire, first as Provincial Marshal of Nobility, then as member of the Fourth Imperial Duma and, once Lithuania had achieved independence, as long-time spokesman of the Russian ethnic minority there.

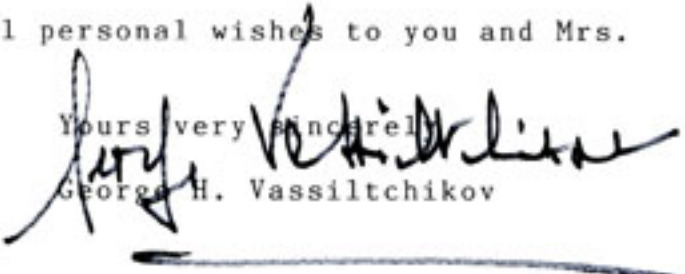
In these various capacities my father felt strongly that his prime duty but also his emotional compulsion was to help maintain positive, indeed friendly relations between the various ethnies that inhabited the country, and especially between the Lithuanian majority and the Russian minority. This, many generations later, remains, as I see it, one of the crucial tasks in newly-independent Lithuania - a task all the more difficult to achieve in the light of what the country suffered, together with all the other peoples of the USSR, during the years of Communist rule. But because of that, my father, for all the material privations he necessarily endured (including, of course, the loss of virtually all our property) was on excellent terms, based on mutual respect and trust, with many Lithuanian statesmen in the inter-war period (e.g. Messers. Slezevicius, Valdemaras, Smetona, Tubelis, e.a.)

The feelings that animated my father animate also me. For I spent some of my adolescent years in Lithuania, fleeing it (already after its partial occupation by the Red Army) in January 1940. I owe my life to Premier Merkys (an old family friend), who personally issued me an exit-permit, only to perish himself later in the GULAG. He, together with others who showed kindness to us when we were in need, will always be in my prayers.

I am at present a dual Swiss/British citizen. But I still hold (as you can see) my pre-1940 Lithuanian passport (last renewed by the Lithuanian Embassy to the Holy See in 1956'), which I recall Mrs. Landsbergis examining here in London with visible curiosity.

In the light of the above, if there is anything I can ever do for a newly-free Lithuania, whether abroad or in Russia, which is still trying, with such difficulty, to shake off the shackles of Communism, and where I go very often on business. I will gladly do so. And my children - Natasha (aged 26) and Alexander (aged 25) feel likewise. For in this way we would merely be reviving a family tradition that started almost 150 years ago...

With my respectful personal wishes to you and Mrs. Landsbergis,

Yours very sincerely

George H. Vassiltchikov