



Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Damian R. Leader for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

1. (U) SUMMARY: Media coverage of the parliamentary investigation into alleged CIA prisons in Lithuania has been marked by inaccuracies in the foreign media and criticism of the government in local media. Lithuanian commentators have been critical of the government for damaging the U.S.-Lithuania relationship, saying that the primary beneficiary is Russia. A popular Lithuanian news website reprinted an article, which originated from an organization with clear ties to the Russian government, that flatly said that CIA and Lithuanian operatives tortured terrorist suspects in Lithuania. End summary.

2. (U) Following the December 22 release of the parliamentary National Defense and Security Committee's report on the alleged CIA prison in Lithuania, the Lithuanian media continued their coverage of the issue, though not much of substance was added to the topic. In addition to the comments by various former government officials (reftel), former presidents Valdas Adamkus and Rolandas Paksas weighed in. Adamkus earlier had said that if a secret prison actually had existed, those responsible for establishing it should be prosecuted. After release of the report, he said he was "certain that this never happened and nobody proved (him) wrong" about that. Paksas, whose presidency ended in impeachment but who is now a member of the European Parliament, said again, as he had testified to the committee, that he had rejected a request by the then-head of the State Security Service (VSD), Mėcis Laurinkus, to bring terrorism suspects to Lithuania.

3. (C) The most significant event since the initial reactions has been a war of words between President Dalia Grybauskaite and Foreign Minister Vygaudas Usackas over the meaning of the committee's conclusions. After the report was released, Grybauskaite said in a widely reported interview that the committee had basically confirmed her "indirect suspicions" about the existence of a prison. Usackas, on the other hand, said explicitly on December 28 that "the most important message to the world is that the committee did not find that ...(Lithuania) hosted CIA prisons." Grybauskaite tartly responded that "if Mr. Usackas knows better than the commission's investigation and is very certain, I sincerely wish him good luck." Prime Minister Andrius Kubilius has declined to take sides in that argument, but has said that the Foreign Minister has every right to commend independently. (Note: We are reporting septel on what appears to be growing conflict between Grybauskaite and Usackas. End note.)

4. (SBU) Kubilius did try to set the record straight after



he was misquoted by the New York Times, which said that he had compared the behavior of the United States to "Soviet methods." Kubilius actually had been referring to Lithuania's VSD, not the United States. The Embassy alerted his staff that English-language media had been misrepresenting his statement, and on December 30 his press office released a statement (in English) reiterating what he had actually said. That statement also said that "the purpose of the parliamentary investigation was to establish the role of the Lithuanian authorities in providing conditions for the operation of the so-called CIA prisons in Lithuania. Neither the investigation nor the Prime Minister having commented on its finding seek to assess the intentions or actions of the CIA or the... American Government."

5. (U) The right-wing and sometimes anti-American newspaper "Respublika," which is the second-largest daily in Lithuania, had initially reported on December 24 that ABC News and the New York Times had misquoted Kubilius, though it did so under the headline, "Lithuania Seen as an Ally of the CIA." Over the following week, a few other newspaper commentators also complained that foreign media had overstated the committee's conclusions.

6. (U) Most of the media's criticism, however, was directed against the government for conducting its investigation at all. Valentinas Mite, commenting in Lithuania's most popular Internet news portal, delfi.lt, criticized the government for directing its actions "against our ally... without whose support NATO would not move a finger to help us when in trouble." He concluded darkly that "Lithuania should not expect serious cooperation with the CIA in the future." This tone was picked up by several other commentators, who essentially argued that Lithuania's cooperation in all aspects of the fight against terrorism won the country its coveted, and much-needed, membership in NATO.

VILNIUS 00000005 002 OF 002

7. (U) The newspaper "Vilniaus Diena," in a December 29 article headlined "CIA prison: the other side of the coin," wrote, "Who benefits from this noise? No doubt it's the Kremlin and some larger European states who were irritated by the quite independent attitude of Lithuania towards the priorities of European foreign policy and its close partnership with the United States. Now we lose everything at once: our partnership with the United States, because who would believe in a country where the top people are not able to keep secrets and solve problems with press conferences? Nor do we gain new friends in the old Europe."

8. (U) Several editorials, including those printed December 23 in the major papers "Lietuvos Rytas" and "Verslo Zinios,"



lamented the fact that the Russian media used the prolonged investigation as an opportunity to beat up Lithuania over its alliance with the United States. Mite, the commentator quoted above, wrote that "the society is becoming more pro-Russian, pro-Putin, and anti-American feelings are growing stronger." On January 4, "Lietuvos Rytas" ran an interview with Adamkus in which the former president said, "No doubt, this will affect Lithuania's relations with the United States." He also said that the assumptions made in the report "especially are undermining the confidence in Lithuania of NATO allies."

9. (U) On January 1, the "Lietuvos Rytas" website, lrytas.lt, reprinted an article from a Canadian website, globalresearch.ca, which itself credited the Strategic Culture Foundation. That foundation, based in Moscow, has ties to Russian state media, academic institutions and businesses. The Lithuanian website prefaced the article by saying it was the type of damaging rumor that can now be found in media around the world as a result of the parliamentary investigation. The article said the CIA and Lithuania's security services jointly carried out an operation, called Amber Rebuff, in which "supposed al Qaeda militants captured in Afghanistan... were subjected to interrogation with tortures with the goal of obtaining information about Muslim extremist groups."

10. (U) The article also says the CIA was behind the impeachment of Paksas and that the United States probably was behind Lithuania expelling three Russian diplomats accused of spying in the same period, "quite likely... to prevent Amber Rebuff from being watched." The article labels then-Ambassador Stephen Mull "a career CIA operative who played an important role in Poland in the Solidarity epoch. At that time Mull served as the political counselor at the U.S. Embassy in Warsaw and was regarded as a major troublemaker by the Polish security for his active involvement with local dissenters." The article says, "Mull was in charge of the whole operation involving the secret CIA jails in Lithuania.... Only the most trusted Lithuanian agents were employed in the operation, some of them assisting the U.S. operatives in conducting interrogations with noise and light tortures, electric shocks, water(board)ing, putting plastic bags on the victims' heads, etc." The article also said that while most reports say that eight individuals were held in the "Antaviliai torture chamber," the true "number of people tortured had probably been some ten times higher."

11. (U) The article continues, "The U.S. Embassy and the CIA station in Lithuania (Daniel Gage, head of the economics department of the U.S. Embassy in Lithuania is particularly active) are taking urgent measures to block the efforts made by the parliament and the media to find out more about the torture centers in Lithuania." By the morning of January 4, the lrytas.lt article had drawn nearly 500 comments from



readers. The predominant opinion expressed was criticism of the website for publishing Russian-financed propaganda from strange sources, and accusing the website of being a Russian tool. Other readers criticized Grybauskaite for sparking the investigation and damaging Lithuania's reputation. Other said they believed the article to be true, and said the United States should compensate Lithuania for the damage caused.

12. (C) We have heard from government officials, businessmen, and parliamentarians of their concern that the continuing media coverage of this story will harm U.S-Lithuanian relations. We understand that several Seimas members will abstain from voting on the Committee report to show their displeasure with how this is playing out.

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