

OPINION

less and legless people in Afghanistan, an aftermath of the Taliban's body-mutilating punishments. Moreover, most importantly, it has carried out the most heinous terrorist acts in modern history.

Do you see any signs of the Lithuanian troops withdrawing, together with the EU's Western troops in the near future? Alternatively, more likely, will Lithuania remain the committed ally of the U.S. and retreat from Afghanistan with its contingent? As the mission is a big financial commitment (nearly 63 million litas in 2010) for us, should it not be another reason to abandon it in the crisis-hit economy?

It is hard to foresee the political decisions to come. However, I want to emphasize that the Lithuanian input in restoring the Gore province and guaranteeing its stability and security is extremely high. Afghans themselves do appreciate the efforts a lot. The Lithuanian troops have been on a very noble mission there, which does pay off strengthening Lithuania's security guarantees in the framework of EU and NATO.

Your beliefs are hard to shake. How would you describe the Afghan war - is it nearly won, winnable, possible to win or nearly impossible to win?

(Laughs) Once you look at the modern history of Afghanistan, you will see it has been shaken by numerous civic clashes, squabbles and wars. The international community has done a lot in order to build up a political, economic and security core, on which Afghans themselves could successfully develop their statehood. When the task is completed, it will make sense to withdraw the Lithuanian troops back home.

You answered diplomatically; however, you wandered off the question. Can the war be won without the region's leaders, Pakistan and India, not substantially engaged in the developments in Afghanistan?

Indeed, Afghanistan lies within the sphere of the regional interests and conflicts of the countries. As EU envoy, I am there to encourage and promote a different approach of the neighboring countries towards Afghanistan. The approach that would create, quality-wise, quite a new foundation for the mutual collaboration, the approach that would change the military politics to beneficial economic transit and economic relations.

How do you see the near future of Afghanistan?

We cannot cheat ourselves, convincing ourselves that, in a few months or years from now, we will create a democracy the way we understand it. Nevertheless, Afghanistan is improving in that facet a lot. Afghanistan has its parliament

Looking at the Lithuanian August

Three minor events of this lazy Lithuanian August are worth some attention. On Aug. 24, the U.S.-based Miss Universe Organization, co-owned by America's Donald Trump and NBC Universal, filed suit in Lithuania claiming copyright violation by the Lithuanian organizers of the Mrs. Universe that was held in Lithuania on Aug. 21. The lawsuit is funny and in the style of The Donald. However, Mrs. Universe was scandalous in Lithuania due to another reason. The Lithuanian government gave it 63,000 litas (18,246 euros) from the state reserve, which is mostly kept for helping people in case of natural disasters. Maybe some observers can describe some participants of Mrs. Universe as natural disasters (though the word "natural" is maybe not suitable due to traces of plastic surgery), but anyway, such spending from the state reserve on the beauty contest provoked protests by the parliamentary opposition, especially now when some villages of the Dzūkija region were devastated by summer squalls. Organizers of other beauty contests in Lithuania, not receiving state aid, also protested - they can apply to the EU institutions, and then maybe even a European Commission letter to the Lithuanian government regarding state aid distorting com-

and Prague Declaration, in Irytas.lt. Vinokuras is a famous liberal fighter against xenophobes and similar idiots. Vinokuras, defending the Prague Declaration, is probably the first Lithuanian Jewish-origin writer to criticize, analytically, Efraim Zuroff, head of the Wiesenthal Center, for playing Moscow's political games, although in the past, MP Emanuelis Zingeris, who signed the Prague Declaration and who did probably the most for revitalizing Jewish heritage in Lithuania in his outburst of emotions, even described Zuroff as "a Nazi," reacting to Zuroff's statement regarding Zingeris' wife who, to the horror of Zuroff, happened to not be a Jew. The Prague Declaration of 2008, signed by, among others, Vaclav Havel, calls for "recognition that many crimes committed in the name of Communism should be assessed as crimes against humanity, serving as a warning for future generations, in the same way Nazi crimes were assessed by the Nuremberg Tribunal." According to Zuroff, comparison of Communism and Nazism is unacceptable.

Bravo should be said to Polish President Bronislaw Komorowski for promotion of the Lithuanian tourism industry! He decided to spend his summer vacation with his wife in August in Lithuania's Cu-

fied by a majority of other people only when Lithuanian President Dalia Grybauskaitė went to visit him there. Not many (if any) foreign presidents spend their vacations in the Baltics. On the other hand, it is difficult to call Komorowski a foreigner. Both his parents are from Lithuania. He usually spends his vacations in his summer villa in the ethnic Lithuanian-dominated lands of northeastern Poland and he understands some Lithuanian. Komorowski likes to remind us that his Lithuanian ancestor, fighting hand-in-hand with Vytautas the Great, perished in the Battle of Vorskla River of 1399 when the Mongols beat the Lithuanians. In case the outcome of that battle would have been different, Vytautas would have gained control over all the Russian lands (and maybe in a further perspective, even parts of China), and the state of Russia maybe would never have appeared (though it is difficult to predict how sustainable such a Lithuanian empire could be).

Who knows - maybe then, due to a different political culture, two figures, now known as Lenin and Mao, would just have been law abiding Lithuanians in some provincial Lithuanian towns of Moscow and Beijing, and Komorowski's parents would have no need to leave Lithuania, escaping from the Soviets - his-

that sizzles with discussions. It might be surprising to many to find out that many different, extreme view newspapers are being published in Afghanistan, as well as many diverse TV stations are on air, promulgating the extreme views. It is a big achievement for Afghanistan, which is the second poorest country in the world. I do believe that, in three of four years from now, with the international assistance, the fundamental core of statehood will be laid, and Afghanistan will be able to take it from there on its own. It will happen if Afghans will have their own functioning police and military forces, if they will be able to decrease the wide-spread corruption, if the region's other influential countries like Pakistan, India, China, United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia and some others will get involved in the process.

However, when it comes to the war outlook, the issues of mentality and mindset should be taken into consideration. Is it possible to win the war when 95 percent of the Afghan countryside population lives in the conditions of the medieval ages?

I do think that NATO and the EU are striving to change somehow Afghans' mentality or mindset. As I mentioned before, we are there with the help mission, not to impose our lifestyles and views.

Are you not concerned over your own safety there? How do you move around there? Do you live in a heavily guarded compound?

A Lithuanian proverb says that if you are afraid of the wolf, do not go to the forest. We have an intelligence service which provides us information about possible risks, explosions, clashes and the appearance of suicide bombers. When being there, everyone has to put up with the thought of being in an endangered area. Despite the heightened security measures, I am trying to live as normal a life as I can under the circumstances there. Thus, every Thursday night, the EU staff plays football, volleyball and basketball with the Afghans. We have already erected a basketball court and started teaching locals the secrets of the game. However, I have to admit, it does not go very well so far. On Friday morning, I usually play tennis with Indian, UK and Russian ambassadors. I come back to Lithuania every other month.

Interview by Linas Jegelevicius

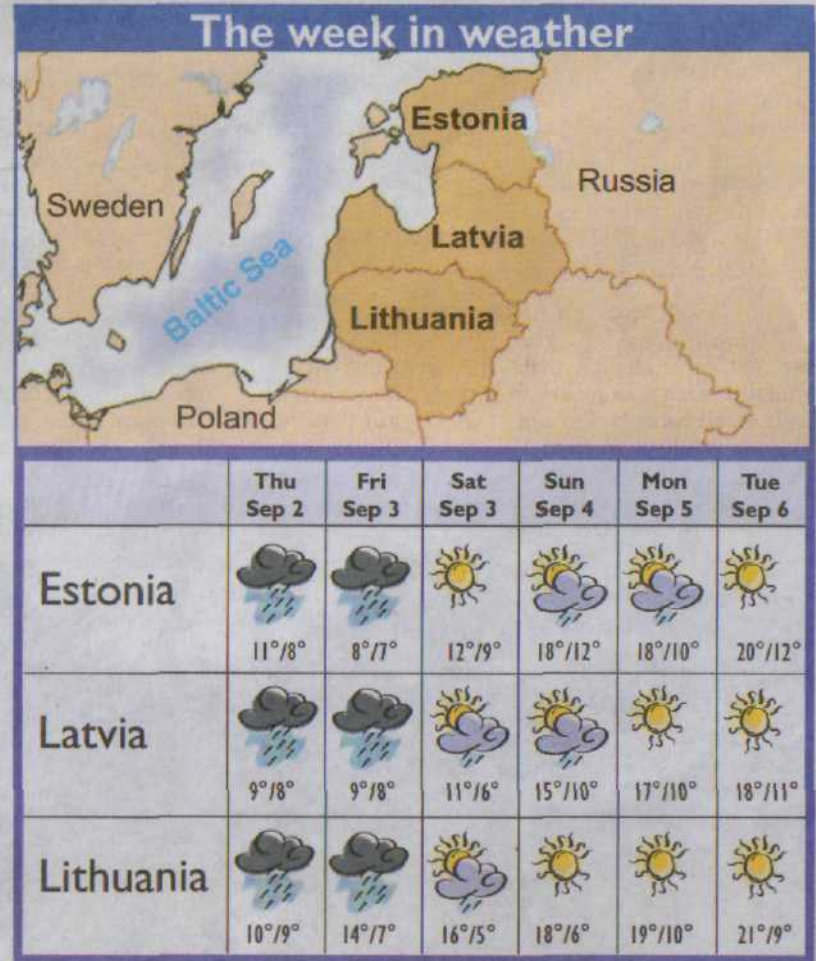
regarding state aid distorting competition among market actors, could follow.

To avoid expected protests, organizers of Mrs. Universe stated that their contest promotes fighting against violence and human trafficking – it would be of similar relevance to give state aid with the intention to fight CO2 emissions, to the traditional fest of eating baked crows in Western Lithuania. Media rumors say that the state aid and even some contest's promotion by the Lithuanian Foreign Ministry were made because one of the organizers is a relative of an influential judge close to the ruling party. No wonder then that Prime Minister Andrius Kubilius did not try to defend such spending, and stated that he does not remember anything about giving that state aid to a private company. At least the good outcome of the scandal over such state aid is that Finance Minister Ingrida Simonyte promised that it will not happen ever again, though this is a kind of hypocrisy – the money would never be given to Mrs. Universe without the sanction of Simonyte.

On Aug. 17, Arkadijus Vinokuras published his article, Zuroff

his wife in August in Lithuania's Kuronian Spit. They stayed in a simple hotel among simple people with no presidential chic. They were identi-

ty games for some fun of what would have been, if that would have happened; it's unpredictable stuff.



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