Memorandum of the Governor-General of the Vilna Gubernia Sviatopolk-Mirskii on the Lithuanian Latin Alphabet

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This study is devoted to an important problem in Lithuanian history from the second half of the nineteenth century, namely on using the Latin alphabet and the Gothic script in Lithuanian writing and their replacement with Russian (Cyrillic) characters. The ban covered the period between 1864 and 1904 and it is conceived by Lithuanians as ‘a prohibition of Lithuanian publication’ by which the political and administrative authorities of the Russian Empire sought to assimilate (Russify) the Lithuanians; more precisely, it was one of the means to achieve the desired aim. On the other hand, there were assertions that in the context of the imperial policy the replacement of the traditional alphabet for the Cyrillic was linked to ‘the struggle between rival influences and a desire to entrench a variant of identity which would be related to the loyalty to the empire’. In Lithuania (then called the Northwest Province) it was to be a means in the struggle against Polish influence. It is worth stressing one more aspect: the period of the press ban was crucial for the self-consciousness

1 Among numerous publications on this topic the following major works could be indicated: V. Merkys, Nelegalioji lietuvių spauda kapitalizmo laikotarpiu (ligi 1904 m.). Politinės susikūrimo aplinkybės (Vilnius, 1978); id., Lietuvos valstiečiai ir spauda XIX a. pabaigoje–XX a. pradžioje (Vilnius, 1982); id., Knygnešių laikai. 1864–1904 (Vilnius, 1994); A. Tyla, Garšvų knygnešių draugija (Vilnius, 1991); id. ‘Tautos tvirtybė (Kova dėl savosios spaudos)’, Darbai ir dienos, 38(2004) pp. 7–16; R. Vėbra, Lietuviškos spaudos draudimas 1964–1904 (Vilnius, 1996); D. Staliūnas, comp., Raidžių draudimo metai (Vilnius, 2004); W. Rodkiewicz, Russian Nationality Policy in the Western Provinces of the Empire (1863–1905) (Lublin, 1998), pp. 176–191; T.R. Weeks, ‘Russification and the Lithuanians, 1863–1905’, Slavic Review, 60(2001), pp. 96–114; P. Łossowski, ‘Russian Authorities’ Policy towards National Minorities. Prohibition of Lithuanian Publications, 1864–1904’ Acta Poloniae Historica, 88(2003), pp. 65–84.

2 A. Miller, ‘Kalba, tapatybė ir lojalumas Rusijos imperijos valdžios politikoje’, Raidžių draudimo metai, p. 24.
of the cultural and even political identity of the modern Lithuanian nation.

The article focuses on three aspects: (1) Lithuanian publications in the traditional Roman alphabet and the activity of book carriers (also referred to as book smugglers), (2) the circumstances of the origin of Governor General of Vilnius Count Piotr Sviatopolk-Mirski’s memorandum, and (3) the importance of the memorandum in discussions over lifting the ban on the use of the Latin alphabet.

1. On 5 (17, New Style) June 1864, the repressor of the 1863 Uprising, Governor General Mikhail Murav’ev of Vilnius, acting in concert with the Russian government, signed a letter addressed to the Censor Committee of Vilnius ordering it to discontinue the printing of Lithuanian primers in Polish (Latin) letters and to require their re-writing in Cyrillic characters. This letter was followed by other bans from Murav’ev on some other types of writings, and the process was further intensified by his successor, Governor General Konstantin Kaufman, whose confidential circular letter of 6 (18) September 1865 obliged the governors of the Vilna, Kovno, Grodno, Minsk, Vitebsk and Mogilev gubernias to forbid printing, importing and distributing any Lithuanian publications in Latin and Polish characters. A ban was issued separately for the Kingdom of Poland, which comprised the Lithuanian gubernia of Suvalki. On 20 December 1872 (1 January 1873) the import of Lithuanian publications in the Gothic script was forbidden. However, the ban on printing was never finalized in law. The ukazes of Tsar Alexander II of 30 January 1866 and 22 April 1880 were never published in the law codes and had no legal power. Therefore the legal basis for the discrimination of Lithuanian publications printed in non-Cyrillic characters was the circular letter no. 141 issued by the minister of internal affairs Piotr Valuev on 23 September (5 October) 1865; it was cited in the preparation of other circulars, issued by the governor general of Vilna and by the governors of other gubernias. The inefficiency of this ban had been noticed long ago, and it became particularly obvious about the year 1880. Nevertheless nearly a quarter of a century passed before the Russian government resolved to revoke this unsuccessful experiment.

Resistance to the ban did not take long because late in 1868 and early in 1869 the authorities found out about Lithuanian publishing in Roman characters abroad. During the entire period of the press ban the greatest number of Lithuanian books was produced in Germany. The most important places of this activity were Tilsit,
Bitėnai, Prökul, Memel, Königsberg, Heydekrug and Ragnit. Subsequently émigré Lithuanians in the United States of America started publishing Lithuanian books. According to available data, 3,953 Lithuanian publications (excepting periodicals) were issued between 1865 and 1904. For comparison, 55 Lithuanian books in the Cyrillic alphabet (or 63 including their variant editions) were published in the same four decades.

Books published abroad reached Lithuania illegally; they were brought and distributed among the population by book carriers. The extent of these activities can be determined on the basis of data relating to persons involved in carrying, distributing, keeping or reading Lithuanian publications. Vytautas Merkys collected data on 2,854 persons who had dealings with Russian legislative institutions. In their book, Beniaminas Kaluškevičius and Kazys Misius published the biographies of 5,880 book carriers and secret village teachers (daraktoriai).

The extent of illegal Lithuanian publications and their distribution was a real force, the existence of which made the administration of the Russian Empire treat all those activities very seriously and to resort to strict repressive measures. Therefore, fines for transporting, distributing and keeping illegal Lithuanian literature were heavy. Current research shows that 1,584 book carriers were punished: 52 were exiled to Siberia and the northern gubernias of European Russia, 89 were imprisoned and later banished to neighbouring gubernias, 866 were detained and served their sentence in local lockups and guardhouses, 21 got financial fines, 478 were discharged and 78 were pardoned by various manifestoes of the tsar.

2. Count Sviatopolk-Mirskii (1857–1914) was appointed governor general of Vilna in September 1902. Formerly he had been assistant minister of internal affairs, and from the post of governor general of Vilna he was promoted directly to minister of internal affairs in August 1904. Having taken office, Sviatopolk-Mirskii stated that ‘the transcription of Lithuanian publications is one of the most

3 V. Merkys, _Draudžiamosios lietuviškos spaudos kelias. 1864–1904._ Informacinė knyga (Vilnius, 1994); id., ‘Lietuvių tautos kova dėl spaudos laisvės 1864–1904 metais’, _Lietuviškos spaudos draudimas 1864–1904 metais_ (Vilnius, 2004), pp. 14–15.
4 B. Kaluškevičius, K. Misius, _Lietuvos knygnešiai ir daraktoriai. 1864–1904_ (Vilnius, 2004), p. 672.
5 Merkys, ‘Lietuvių tautos kova’, p. 14.
important questions of the Russian state policy in the Northwest Province entrusted to me by the tsar’. He presented his position in the letter of 3 February 1903 to the minister of internal affairs Viacheslav von Pleve. In order to provoke better response to this question the governor general of Vilna had fifty copies of this letter made and sent them to senior officials of the Russian Empire under the title the Memorandum of the Governor-General of Vilna, Kovno and Grodno on the Lithuanian Latin Alphabet. One copy of it and a covering letter were forwarded to Pleve. A microfilm of the memorandum, procured by Merkys, is held by the Manuscript Department of the Lithuanian Institute of History. Here we present the texts of the memorandum and the covering letter for the chancery of the Ministry of Internal Affairs in English translation.

3. The Governor General of Vilna Sviatopolk-Mirskii is treated by historians as a politician of liberal views or at least ‘liberally inclined’. Merkys ranks him as a reformer. His memorandum was welcomed in the illegal Lithuanian press and was even translated into Lithuanian. The memorandum drew the attention of the contemporary Russian-writing authors as well.

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6 Cited in Merkys, Knygnešių laikai, p. 373.
7 See the publications of A. Tyla, Lietuvių spaudos draudimo panaikinimo byla (Vilnius, 1973), pp. 133–142; Lietuvių spaudos draudimo panaikinimo byla (Vilnius, 2004), pp. 138–147, 318–323. In the second edition the text is published in Russian and in Lithuanian.
8 Merkys, Knygnešių laikai, p. 375.
9 Russian State Historical Archive (RGIA), St Petersburg, f. 1284, op. 190, d. 83.
10 Lietuvių klausimas Rusijos imperijoje XIX a.–XX a. pradžioje. Faksimilinis valdininkų ataskaitų ir dokumentų rinkinys, ed. by R. Vėbra (Vilnius, 2001), p. 9. This publication presents an official account for the years 1902 and 1903, prepared by the Governor General of Vilna Sviatopolk-Mirskii and the memorandum on this account prepared by the chancery of the Committee of Ministers at the Emperor’s behest.
11 Merkys, Knygnešių laikai, p. 372.
12 Particularly important is a letter of the governor general of Vilna, who “having meticulously examined the question of the Lithuanian press”, finds out that “permission must be given to publish Lithuanian books and newspapers in Lithuanian Latin characters in Muscovy”, certainly under censorship supervision. It is noteworthy that the authors of the publication also found some controversial passages in the governor’s memorandum. The lack of historical arguments is emphasized strongly, and the statements about the ways of eliminating Polish influence on the Lithuanians are criticized. ‘Raštas apie lotyniškai-lietuviškas raides Vilniaus, Kauno ir Gardėno general-gubernatoriaus’, Varpas, no. 4–5, 1904.
Sviatopolk-Mirskii’s memorandum appeared at the time when ‘the period of hesitation and deliberation resulting in the lifting of the press ban’ was over in the circles of the Russian government.\footnote{Vėbra, \emph{Lietuviškos spaudos draudimas}, p. 25.} Late in 1897 the ministers of home affairs and of education were entrusted by the Committee of Ministers with the task of discussing issues related to the Lithuanian press. Various Russian administrative institutions were engaged in the discussions, and at one time there were two schools of thought: some were for a partial relaxation of the prohibition (e.g. the minister of education, Grigorii Zenger) while others spoke up for a complete lifting of all restrictions. Having examined the situation of the press ban in various respects, Sviatopolk-Mirskii stated unambiguously that all restrictions should be lifted unconditionally and without any exceptions. Thus, he wrote:

Nowhere and never has literature been created by the government. Developing in close contacts with the spiritual growth of the people, literature belongs to society entirely. The government can merely stimulate, even direct but not create literature. Despite all prohibitive measures taken in regard to the Lithuanian Latin alphabet and despite government publications in the Russian alphabet, this alphabet has not been accepted by the Lithuanians.

This position was vital in neutralizing the influence of the adherents of the press ban. According to Merkys, this memorandum weakened the weight of the standpoint of the former Governor General of Vilna, Vitalii Trotskii, contained in his memorandum to the tsar on 6 March 1901.\footnote{Merkys, \emph{Knygnešių laikai}, pp. 363, 375.} Sviatopolk-Mirskii’s attitude was supported by the Russian Academy of Sciences, which sent its opinion to the Ministry of Internal Affairs. The Academy’s position and Sviatopolk-Mirskii’s memorandum were essential for the hesitating Minister of Internal Affairs Pleve’s final decision to revoke the enactments covering the Lithuanian alphabet in Lithuanian publications. This judgment was presented to the Committee of Ministers by the Minister of Internal Affairs. It should be noted that Sviatopolk-Mirskii treated the legalization of the Lithuanian press as a necessary measure for strengthening the empire.\footnote{Ibid., p. 375.} Many other officials of the Russian Empire also perceived clearly that the prohibition of the Lithuanian press in the traditional alphabet did not yield the desired results and had to be lifted.
As early as 1898 the Governor General of Warsaw, Aleksei Imeretinskii, had delivered to the tsar a memorandum in which he argued that lifting the ban on the Latin alphabet was a pressing matter of cardinal importance.

The memorandum of the governor general of Vilna appeared at the time when the discussions in the ruling circles of the Russian Empire about the Lithuanian press in the Latin alphabet had reached a critical moment. A tough line of the governor general of Vilna possibly contributed to a solution to this issue in a manner favourable to the Lithuanians.

The original of the document is held in the Russian State Historical Archive (RGIA), St Petersburg, f. 1284, op. 190, d. 838.

A microfilm copy is in the Manuscript Department of the Lithuanian Institute of History, Vilnius, f. 17, b. 209/47.

Published in: ‘Raštas apie lotyniškai-lietuviškas raides Vilniaus, Kauno ir Gardėno general-gubernatoriaus’, Varpas, no. 4–5, 1904; A. K. V[oen]skii, Litovskii shrift (Vilnius, 1904).
CHANCERY OF THE GOVERNOR-GENERAL
OF THE VILNA, KOVNO AND GRODNO GUBERNIAS

March 24, 1903*

Vilna

To the Director of the Chancery of the Ministry of Internal Affairs

On the orders of His Highness, the Chancery of the Governor-General has the honour to dispatch to Your Excellency a memorandum on the Lithuanian Latin alphabet; permission to use it is being discussed at present by the Committee of Ministers.

For the Comptroller of the Chancery (signature illegible)
Chancery Official for Special Instructions (signature illegible)

* In the document all dates are indicated according to the Old Style.
MEMORANDUM OF THE GOVERNOR-GENERAL OF THE VILNA, KOVNO AND GRODNO GUBERNIAS ON THE LITHUANIAN LATIN ALPHABET

Entering into closer investigation of the matter of which alphabet is used in Lithuanian publications, I consider it my duty to declare that I attach utmost national importance to any possible solution of this issue. With regard to the Northwest Province, the question of the Lithuanian alphabet is of crucial importance and its solution depends on the correctness of the state of policy as a whole.

Having emerged late into the arena of European history and possessing poor cultural means, the Lithuans fall easily under the influence of their Russian, German and Polish neighbours. Under these circumstances, the existence of the Lithuans as a nation is inconceivable. Lithuania for the most part is becoming a section of the Russian state. The historical woes of the latter tip a temporary balance in favour of Poland. The collapse of Poland leads to the attachment of almost the entire Lithuanian territory to the Russian Empire. At present only a comparatively insignificant part of the Lithuanian population (about 500,000 souls) lives in Prussia, while the main masses of people (over 2,000,000 souls) are Russian citizens.

This circumstance determines the essence of the Lithuanian question.

The general striving towards education, which swept over Europe in the sixteenth century, did not bypass the Lithuanian people. In Lithuania, like in many other places, national activists began to appear. They stimulated the development of Lithuanian literature. The year 1547 marked the appearance of the first Lithuanian book. It was followed by other publications and by the beginning of the seventeenth century no less than seventeen Lithuanian books had been published. In the following fifty years eighteen new books appeared and sixteen more by the start of the eighteenth century. In the first half of the eighteenth century twenty eight Lithuanian books were published and over sixty in the second half. Such a slow development of Lithuanian publishing and consequently of literature is accounted for by the dreadful conditions in which that process
proceeded. Lithuanian books were subject to harsh persecution from the moment they appeared in the middle of the sixteenth century. At that time books were confiscated and destroyed. It is not known who was engaged in that destruction. Judging by similar cases in other parts of Europe it can be maintained that the principal persecutors of Lithuanian books were Roman Catholic clergymen. They were driven to this by the not unreasonable fear that in the aftermath of the development of Lithuanian literature in the vernacular the international Roman Catholic Church would succumb to Protestantism in Lithuania.

Since they first appeared in the middle of the sixteenth century Lithuanian books were printed exclusively in Latin characters, sometimes in the Gothic script. However, already in the sixteenth century Lithuanian literati perceived that the Latin alphabet was incapable of representing sounds that are typical of the Lithuanian language. Therefore, adapting that alphabet to the specific characteristics of their native tongue, the Lithuanians developed their own alphabet, which duly could be called Lithuanian Latin. Only an alphabet of that sort rather than Polish Latin, as was erroneously supposed by many, could represent long vowels, diphthongal and nasal sounds characteristic of Lithuanian properly. As they developed their own alphabet, the Lithuanians introduced a number of signs, alien to the Polish language, into the Latin alphabet.

As has been noted above, Lithuanian literature developed slowly but relentlessly until the nineteenth century. In the nineteenth century Lithuanian book printing underwent serious changes: in the first half of that century about 200 books were printed, and in the second half that number reached 1,000. Lithuanian periodical publications began to appear in the second third of the nineteenth century, and at present they number over thirty.

In the period between the sixteenth and the latter half of the nineteenth centuries a huge number of Lithuanian books have been published on the territory of the present-day Russian possessions. Though at the start of Lithuanian publishing some books appeared in Königsberg and Tilsit, the old-established centre of the Lithuanian press was Vilnius as the cultural and historical centre of the Lithuanian nation. In addition to Vilnius, Lithuanian books were printed in Kėdainiai, Suprasl, Dvinsk, Suvalkai as well as in Riga and Jelgava (Mitau).

Thus, having originated in the sixteenth century, Lithuanian literature naturally developed within the boundaries of the area
inhabited by the majority of the Lithuanian people (*plemia*). Having acquired this territory and having included the main mass of the Lithuanian people among its subjects, Russia has been able to control the development of the Lithuanians without any detriment to its general state interests.

These favourable conditions have changed radically since the ban on the printing of Lithuanian books in the Lithuanian Latin alphabet. This prohibition was not based on any law and has not become part of official legislation. In accordance with the behest of His Majesty of 30 January 1866 only *official Lithuanian* publications have had to be printed in the Russian alphabet. As far as private publications are concerned, the requirement to issue them in the Russian alphabet was first promulgated by the former governor general of the Northwest Province, Count Murav’ev in 1864. In this case Count Murav’ev was guided by the idea of the necessity to free the ethnic Lithuanian population from Polish influence. It cannot be denied that the perception of this necessity was correct. However, the means selected to achieve the aim was absolutely wrong. It was a great mistake to suppose that the Lithuanians had used a *Polish Latin* alphabet. Another mistake was the disregard of the individual development of Lithuanian literature. Doubtless, at that time Lithuanian literature with its several hundred books was not rich. The essence of the matter was the intensity of its development on the basis of the Lithuanian Latin alphabet which had been used for that purpose for centuries. Seemingly, account ought to have been taken of the fact that an alphabet as such, without changing the actual language, cannot Polonize the Lithuanians by the Latin way of writing or Russify them by the Russian manner of lettering. It is clear that the national distinctiveness of a people is determined by its language rather than the alphabet it uses. However, in spite of the poverty of cultural means at our disposal in the ‘60s, the poor quality of popular education at the time based on the Russian language and a rather frivolous attitude to the philological requirements, the highest administrative bodies of the Northwest Province hoped to achieve excellent results in the field of Russian influence also by introducing the Russian alphabet into Lithuanian literature. The ideas of the administrators were supported by the opinion of the scholars Hilferding and Mikutskii and consequently seemed even more correct. The former prepared a Russian ‘primer’ for the Latvian language spoken in the Vitebsk gubernia, and the latter produced a similar elementary textbook for the Lithuanian language.
The administrative measure taken by Count Murav’ev was endorsed by Governor General von Kaufman in 1865. In future this measure, probably, was preserved through sheer inertia. True, the question about the repealing this measure was raised on several occasions, but it was not subjected to any thorough examination. The proponents of the Russian alphabet for Lithuanian asserted categorically that the Northwest Province was historically a Russian land and had to remain such; at the same time they took no notice of the fact that the Russian alphabet not changed the Lithuanian language a jot and that no matter what alphabet was used it remained Lithuanian and had nothing in common with the Russian language.

At present almost four decades have passed since Count Murav’ev’s ban on publishing Lithuanian books in the Lithuanian Latin alphabet. It is a good moment to evaluate the results of this measure and its expediency and validity for the future.

What has been said shows that the prohibitive measure caught Lithuanian literature at the moment it was beginning to develop strongly. The ban has not checked its development. On the contrary, the number of books published in the second half of the nineteenth century is five times higher than the number published in the first half of the century. The old centres of Lithuanian publishing (Vilnius, Kėdainiai, Dvinsk, etc.) have been replaced by new ones (Tilsit, Memel, Bitėnai and Priekulė in East Prussia). Thus, the centre of Lithuanian literature has shifted from our territory, inhabited by 2,000,000 Lithuanians to a neighbouring country with no more than 500,000 souls of Lithuanian nationality. Additionally, the development of emigration to America has led to the rise of a Lithuanian colony of 300,000 with their own vernacular literature there.

At the time when Lithuanian literature (on the basis of the Lithuanian Latin alphabet) was developing naturally outside the boundaries of our State, producing hundreds and hundreds of books and scores of periodicals, in our country, in Russia, odd Lithuanian books, government publications, in the Russian alphabet have been established. Several scores of prayer books and calendars were all that could counter foreign publications. And that is quite comprehensible. Nowhere and never has literature been created by the government. Developing in close contact with the spiritual growth of the people, literature entirely belongs to society. The government can merely stimulate, even direct but not create literature.

Despite all prohibitive measures taken in regard to the Lithuanian Latin alphabet and despite government publications in the Russian
alphabet, this alphabet has not been accepted by the Lithuanians. Official publications, sold almost for next to nothing or given away free, have not found a ready audience. The mere two or three books privately issued in Russia sold badly. By contrast, foreign publications have been disseminated in the Northwest Province in tens of thousands of copies despite their high price, the risk associated with smuggling them and confiscations, and despite the fines levied on their owners and the arrest of distributors.

This phenomenon must be taken into consideration and it should be properly expounded.

This phenomenon must be taken into account because it relates to the life and interests of a whole ethnic group, the vast mass of which is subject to Russia. The adherents of the Russian characters for a Lithuanian alphabet maintain that this script did not take root because, firstly, its opponents were clergymen, spiritual leaders of the Lithuanian people, secondly, the funds allotted for the publication of Lithuanian books were insufficient, and finally Lithuanian Roman Catholic prayer books (in the Russian alphabet) contained statements, alien and contrary to the teachings of the Roman Church. These explanations cannot be considered quite adequate. There is no doubt that the use of the Lithuanian prayer books in the Russian alphabet for anti-Catholic propaganda, which was detected quickly by the Lithuanian clergy, gave an added impetus in the struggle against governmental Lithuanian publications. On the other hand it is certain that the conspicuous failure of the Russian alphabet and consequently of government publications lay in the fact that this alphabet, being three hundred years late compared with the Lithuanian Latin one, was introduced into Lithuanian writing at the time when ethnic Lithuanians had created their own literature and were engaged deeply spiritually in developing it. The prohibition of the Lithuanian Latin alphabet could and actually did oust Lithuanian publishing from Russia, but it did not succeed in suppressing popular writing that had already developed. Insufficient financing of publishing is the least of the causes of the failure of the Russian alphabet. As has already been mentioned, Lithuanian books in the Russian alphabet could hardly be distributed even at a give-away price. An

1 Customs houses confiscated 37,718 Lithuanian books between 1891 and 1893, 40,335 between 1894 and 1896, 39,024 between 1897 and 1899, and 56,182 between 1900 and 1902. There are no data about books confiscated by the Police.

2 At present, even those persons who in their time actively participated in the introduction of the Russian alphabet into Lithuanian books are deeply dissatisfied.
increase of funds and numbers of publications would only enhance
the numbers of spare copies. However, the Lithuanian priest as an
enemy of the Russian alphabet should be given greater attention than
has been generally the case. Ethnic Lithuanian priests represent an
educated class. Coming exclusively from the rural environment,
devoted to the Roman Church and still more to their ethnic com-

munity, they naturally preserve their ethnicity in every possible way.

It is quite understandable that the cultivation of the literary language
recorded in the Lithuanian Latin alphabet in the course of centuries
is a high priority. Naturally, priests cannot but contribute to the
importation of foreign Lithuanian publications, since Lithuanian
publishing is to be found only abroad – in Prussia and America. In
this publishing the Russian Lithuanians (in the first place priests) are
possibly more active than the foreign Lithuanians.

In the latter half of the nineteenth century, ethnic Lithuanians
entered a new phase of development. Until that time, the cultural
progress of the Lithuanian population had been closely related to the
Polish ethnic group.

The year 1863 crushed Polish domination in the Northwest
Province and to a great extent freed the Lithuanian people. At
approximately this time, the process of the Polonization of the
Lithuanians was checked and their independent development began.
The degree of its intensity is illustrated by the rise of Lithuanian
literature and numbers of Lithuanian books. Neither nationalist Lithua-
nians nor Polish politicians have treated or indeed treat the Lithua-
nian Latin alphabet as a means of Polonizing Lithuanians. On the
contrary, Polish nationalists actually perceive a danger for themselves
in the Lithuanian Latin alphabet because its predominance marks the
development of Lithuanian literature and consequently of the national
identity. Therefore, the introduction of the Russian alphabet, no matter
how unsuccessful it might be, has been positive from the point of
view of Polish interests – that alphabet biases Lithuanians unfavourably

with the results of that endeavour. Therefore, one can only wonder that some of
the proponents of the Russian alphabet even today are prone to think that supposedly
simple Lithuanians use that alphabet in their private correspondence in Lithuanian.
Among other things, it is stated that allegedly Lithuanian soldiers write Lithuanian
letters to their relatives in Russian lettering. This belief is based on a misunder-
standing. Russian characters were used in Lithuanian correspondence only in those cases
when an illiterate Lithuanian soldier trusted a literate Russian soldier to write a letter
at his Lithuanian dictation. Such letters were illegible and difficult to make out by
the rural intelligentsia.
towards the Russian Government, and consequently that stimulates Polish-Lithuanian unification and amalgamation.

Account must also be taken of the Polish nationalist manifestations. The Polish nation had its own political and cultural history. Poland is an old rival of Rus’. The age-long cultural and political struggle between the Russians and the Poles is not yet over. Due to great efforts in the Northwest Province much has already been achieved in consolidating this region, ‘subjugated’ from the Polish viewpoint, with ethnic Russia. In future, the local population must be introduced definitely and categorically to the sphere of mutual interests of the Russian government. With this end in view it is necessary to direct the Lithuanian people correctly as they develop culturally. This is a strong healthy ethnic group, making up nearly a third of the entire population of North-west Russia. In this situation, it seems necessary to guide the spiritual development of the Lithuanian people, which at present is completely running out of the Government’s control. Meanwhile now the Lithuanian mind is opinionated exceptionally by those printed works, which as foreign and contraband publications are not reviewed by our censors and consequently are not controlled in any way by our Government. Lithuanian hymns, textbooks of language, history, geography, rural economy, house keeping, crafts, etc., let alone unlawful publications directed specifically against our Government, are distributed in tens of thousands of copies and are a source of ill-gotten gains for many people, including police officials. Doubtless, permitting use of the Lithuanian Latin alphabet would lead to the rise of Lithuanian literature at home. It will compete with foreign literature and the Government will have control over it in accordance with its aims and plans. Steered by censorship, this literature and Russian schools would not but turn the views of the Lithuanian people from the West to the East. There are no reasonable grounds for believing that the self-development of the Lithuanian people would present any danger to the state objectives of Russia. The Lithuanian people are a nationality without any historical and cultural traditions. This, as well as a small size of the population and affiliation to our State, conditions its historical future – to be part of the population of Russia. The fate of the Lithuanian people as well as that of the Estonian, Latvian and other peoples that have not created their own cultural past is predetermined by history.

The current situation of the Lithuanian people in Russia and in particular in the region, the administration of which is entrusted to me, must be viewed as quite abnormal. The Church, which is common to both Lithuanians and Poles, enables its Polish leaders to dominate over a relatively little civilized Lithuanian people. The
appointment of spiritual leaders from among ethnic Poles and only in exceptional cases from the Lithuanians, reliable from the Polish viewpoint, has already of old turned the Roman Church into a powerful means of Polonization and a synonym of Polish nationality in the Northwest Province. The de-Polonization of the Western Church in the region entrusted to me by His Highness is a primary present-day task. At the present time, conditions are very favourable for this mission. Systematic persecution of the Lithuanian people on the part of ethnic Poles discredited the latter among, one might say, the whole Lithuanian population. Persecution of the Lithuanian language on the part of the Polish Catholic leaders in church in sermons and during confession, compulsory replacement of Lithuanian hymns by Polish ones, persecution of Lithuanian books, the appointment of Lithuanian priests, unreliable from the Polish viewpoint in far-off and poor parishes make the Lithuanians look to the Russian Government as their sole support. Polish anti-government propaganda has been quite successful among the Lithuanians, the ban on the Lithuanian Latin alphabet and the development of foreign Lithuanian literature have had their own effect, very unfavourable from the government standpoint, but the sense of devotion to Russia is still alive among the Lithuanian population. The further development of this devotion depends entirely on the Government itself. In this case the aim is attainable, though not by repression but by a rightful development of the people in accordance with social laws. To the best of my belief, further commitment by the authorities to the established order with respect to the Lithuanian Latin alphabet would lead to serious complications in the Government’s relations with the Lithuanian people.

I also consider it my duty to state that at present the Government and in particular, the local administration does not have effective means to fight against Lithuanian books imported from abroad. Therefore, this fight is utterly desperate, it merely evokes the anger of the population, corrupts the people by clandestine marketing and makes them spend rather large sums of money on expensive books acquired through smuggling. The corruption of the population is also increased by the fact that, in the face of the persecution of the Lithuanian Latin alphabet accompanied by a forceful imposition of books in the Russian alphabet, the availability of the latter is allegedly a sign of safety. Actually, it is totally irrelevant who prefers books in the Lithuanian Latin alphabet – the priest or the people themselves since the solution of this issue in favour of the latter is conditioned by the irresistibility of an ever increasing tendency.
Currently, when the process of Polonizing the Lithuanians is unmistakably on the wane, it is time for the final Russification of local schools. In this connection Russification eliminates any question of the displacement of Lithuanian outside school since the Russification of the people will proceed by itself. The Russian alphabet, which in my opinion has nothing to do with the language as such, has not suppressed the development even of Lithuanian literature which has continued to progress; only it has shifted from the East, out of our realm to the West, to Prussia, together with America supplying our Lithuanians with books, evading government supervision.

On the strength of what has been said I consider that it is both opportune and virtually indispensable that all bans and restraints on the Lithuanian Latin alphabet be removed and the publication of all kinds of Lithuanian books and periodicals in this alphabet be allowed in Russia. Our government has never deemed it necessary to affect the alphabet of the language of other national groups. It was only in respect to the Lithuanian people that this exception was taken, and it was in no way deserved or provoked by this people, and its results have only been unfortunate. Finally, noting the behest of His Majesty of 1866 concerning the printing of governmental Lithuanian publications exceptionally in the Russian alphabet, I believe that by permitting the Lithuanian Latin alphabet for private publications it will pale into insignificance, the more so that such an authoritative government body as the Imperial Academy of Sciences always uses the Lithuanian Latin alphabet for the publication of Lithuanian books. Therefore, it is my belief that the aforementioned behest of His Highness should be revoked since its annulment would be a logical outcome of the sanction to use the Lithuanian Latin alphabet. The general permission to use the Lithuanian Latin alphabet automatically solves the question of the import of Lithuanian foreign publications. This import must be regulated in accordance with general laws relating to foreign publications. Lifting the prohibition on the Lithuanian Latin alphabet would give the Lithuanian people an opportunity for proper development. It will also solve many current political issues in the Northwest Province and make the task of administration easier since in the two-million-strong Lithuanian population it will restore harmony, which is so necessary in this outlying area entrusted to me by the will of the Monarch.

Lieutenant General Count Sviatopolk-Mirskii
Chancery Comptroller Al. Kharuzin

Translated from the Russian by Alfonsas Laučka