



Dominik kardinál Duka O.P.
arcibiskup pražský a primas český

Prague, February 16, 2021

Dear, newborn Lithuanian citizen who had the honour of being born on the day we commemorate the restoration of Lithuania's independence from the capital Vilnius, proclaimed by the Lithuanian Council on February 16th, 1918,

The Lithuanian state thus continued an ancient tradition dating back far beyond from which we derive our era (birth of Christ) and after centuries of Russian domination thus established its modern existence. The years that followed were not easy: the First World War was followed by the annexation by the Soviet Union, the cruel dictatorship of Joseph Vissarionovich Stalin, and with the fall of the Soviet Empire, Lithuania could finally declare its independence in 1990, which was later confirmed by the NATO membership, European States associated in the European Union. I believe that these words will be valid even at a time when, over time, for example in your adulthood, you will reflect on the history of your country while studying at one of the European schools.

I come from the Czech Republic, a country located in the very heart of Europe. Our countries have met occasionally in the past, I would mention, for example, the Bishop of Olomouc, Bruno of Schauenburg (1205-1281), who was also considered a bishop of a diocese comprising the Lithuanian territory. I myself once had the opportunity to visit Lithuania while performing ceremonial duties resulting from the beatification of Archbishop Teofil Matulionis, Bishop of the Kaišiadorys Diocese, who spent almost 16 years in Soviet prisons and labour camps. I also gained a connection with Lithuania in the early 1990s, after the fall of communism, when the Dominican Monastery of Prague became the home of Lithuanian theological students who graduated from the Faculty of Theology in Prague. I also think that, at least in the second half of the 20th century, our countries shared many common destinies: from the liberation struggle during World War II to the defeat of Nazism, the communist totalitarianism of the 1950s and the subsequent path to freedom in the 1980s, led by great personalities back then: the British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, US President Ronald Regan and the first Polish and Slavic Pope, St. John Paul II. They were the ones who, with their foreign policy actions, alongside with their moral attitudes, were able to open the way to freedom for us.

I am writing these lines from the perspective of a man who, after almost eighty years of his earthly life, is approaching that "target goal" where, like every human being, the end of my earthly days awaits me. I look to this moment with faith in our Lord, with the hope of resurrection and eternal life. So I would like to give you only one piece of advice in your life, but all the more urgent: we have fought against the totalitarian regimes of the twentieth century, with insidious dictatorships that wanted to enslave men by force. When I look back to that, I can say with the Apostle Paul, "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith". In all things, accept this freedom as one of the most precious gifts you have received from us, the outgoing generation, and do everything you can to write similar lines in your story one day.

Life is also not easy at this time – I myself watch with apprehension the creeping of some ideologies, some of it in which I often do not even know myself. However, I believe that you and your peers will find enough strength to stand up to them and their efforts to reverse the natural order of things and say "No, we will not let our freedom be taken".

May He bless you with a successful life journey

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "D. Duka", with a cross symbol at the beginning.

Cardinal Dominik Duka
Primate of Bohemia and Archbishop of Prague