



P R E S S R E L E A S E

INFORMATION DIVISION
DEPARTMENT OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS.

OTTAWA - CANADA

April 1, 1948.

A number of Canadian Slavic-language newspapers have recently published a notice on behalf of the Consular Division of the Embassy of the U.S.S.R. to the effect that the Praesidium of the Supreme Soviet of the U.S.S.R. passed a Decree, dated December 16, 1947, according to which all persons of Lithuanian nationality, natives of the city of Klaipeda, and of the Klaipeda, Shilut, and Pageg districts of the Lithuanian S.S.R., who were abroad at the time of the passage of the Decree, and who had not become citizens or subjects of any other country, were obliged to register at U.S.S.R. Embassies or Consulates as Soviet citizens not later than June 1, 1948.

The Department of External Affairs first learned of the Soviet Embassy's intention to call upon Lithuanian nationals residing in Canada to register as Soviet citizens in accordance with this Decree when the notice had already been printed in the foreign-language press. The Department regrets that the Soviet Embassy did not consult it before submitting the announcement to the press. The question of the future citizenship of immigrants who come to Canada with the intention of making a permanent home in this country is a matter in which the Canadian Government takes a deep interest, and the Department would have expected the Soviet Embassy to inform it in advance of any public announcement which it wished to make affecting the citizenship of immigrants of Lithuanian nationality.

The Canadian Government has never extended recognition to the Lithuanian Soviet Socialist Republic as a constituent republic of the U.S.S.R. The Government, therefore, does not regard Lithuanian nationals residing in Canada as citizens of the U.S.S.R. Just as other immigrants from Europe have become Canadian citizens, so, the Government hopes, the Lithuanians who are making their permanent home in Canada will seek Canadian citizenship. The Canadian Citizenship Act gives assurance to anyone who comes to this country with the intention of making a permanent home here that he may readily become a naturalized Canadian citizen and secure the rights and privileges which belong to natural-born Canadians.

Similar registration was provided for by the Soviet Embassy in 1945 in respect of persons formerly resident in parts of the Ukraine and Byelo-Russia which had been incorporated into the U.S.S.R. At that time, it was made abundantly clear to the Soviet Embassy that the Government of Canada did not recognize any obligation on the part of residents of Canada to comply with the Soviet registration notice. The Embassy replied that there was no intention of exercising compulsion and that the text of the announcement indicated that registration was voluntary. The Canadian position with respect to the present notice is the same. The Canadian Government regards the registration of Lithuanian nationals in accordance with the Decree of the Praesidium of the Supreme Soviet of the U.S.S.R., as announced by the Soviet Embassy in the Slavic-language press in Canada, to be entirely a voluntary matter, and recognizes no obligation on the part of any resident of Canada to register.

Since the notice, as it appeared in the Slavic-language press, did not make it clear that there was no obligation to register on the part of Lithuanian nationals who were resident in Canada, the Department of External Affairs wrote to the Soviet Embassy on March 22, requesting the Embassy to insert in any announcement which it might wish to make in the future a sentence which would make it clear that registration was, in fact, voluntary.