

Linkevičius: we have a new government and we can take a fresh look on minority issues

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After the parliamentary elections in Lithuania, Vilnius and Warsaw can take another look at the bilateral relations, according to Lithuanian Minister of Foreign Affairs Linas Linkevičius. However, the head of the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs Witold Waszczykowski stated that “all the keys to improving relations between Poland and Lithuania can be found in Vilnius”.

– I do not agree with the statement that the situation of the Polish minority in Lithuania is dramatic. Of course, the relations with Poland are not as warm and close as they should be, but they are not bad. There are problems to solve, among other things the spelling of the names in passports, but we have a new government and we will be able to take a fresh look on these things. If it were up to me, I assure you, this problem would have been solved long time ago. I agree that it takes too long and that these problems should have been resolved by now. Thus, I accept the criticism – said Linas Linkevičius in an interview with “Kurier Wileński”.



Lithuanian Minister of Foreign Affairs Linas Linkevičius Fot. Marian Paluszkewicz

Lithuanian Minister of Foreign Affairs acknowledged, however, that the Polish-Lithuanian relations are the cause of national minority’s problems and also the cause of abandonment of mutual visits. The representatives of Polish and Lithuanian governments meet only during international gatherings.

– The situation of Poles in Lithuania is not so dramatic and there is no need to refrain ourselves from dialogue and further cooperation. We have managed to resolve many problems of the Polish minority. Almost all Polish schools, as far as I know, have received accreditation. We also managed to solve the hyped up problem concerning the Joachim Lelewel High School. Polish community should be happy. We also managed to cope with the issue of name plates on private properties – it is no more prohibited by law. The re-privatization of the land to the original owners also started and, statistically, Vilnius regions does not stand out form other Lithuanian regions – said Linas Linkevičius.

On December 6th in Brussels, Linkevičius and Waszczykowski participated in a meeting of heads of Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the NATO countries. Linas Linkevičius informed “Kurier” that the bilateral talks concerned mainly safety issues. Altogether, we agreed that Poland and Lithuania need to cooperate more, not only in security matters, but also on issues concerning the Polish minority in Lithuania. It is important that the representatives of the countries meet more often.

– We also agreed that would intensify our contacts and once again invited Witold Waszczykowski to Vilnius. Given the fact that the new government starts its work and it is willing to take a fresh look at the relationship and the benefit from all the possibilities. I think that we can find more ways to improve relations between Lithuania and Poland. We need to focus on tasks that unite us, tasks common to both of us. For example, on issues of security or energy, on joint transport projects, which, unfortunately, are moving slower than we would like them to. We must also return to the methods that have been successfully practiced many years ago, when a group of experts from Poland and Lithuania, for example for education or other issues, met and discussed together and altogether they were looking for a solution. It will surely help in improving the relations – said the head of the Foreign Ministry of Lithuania.

During the meeting, the foreign ministers agreed that they will maintain intensified contacts.

– The interests of Poland and Lithuania, when it comes to relations with Russia and the deployment of NATO forces on the territory of our countries are converging. There are various initiatives related to the control of the reinforcement and to the dialogue with Russia. We agree that our opinions are the same. We do not want to destroy the safety construction already well established in Europe – underlined Linkevičius.

The Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs Witold Waszczykowski indicated that his conversation with the Lithuanian colleague is not “binding” and it is impossible to talk about the details. For now, Poland is waiting for the formal swearing-in of the new Lithuanian government. “We hope that the new government will start implementing the decisions taken before and the standards and norms that are a part of the European’s community acquis” – said Waszczykowski, when asked about the expectations of Warsaw. He added that this applies for example to the rights of the Polish minority in Lithuania. “All of the keys to improving relations between Poland and Lithuania can be found in Vilnius” – he underlined.

Cooperation between NATO and the European Union was one of the main topics during the first day of the meeting of NATO foreign ministers. Ministers approved a package of documents implementing the Joint Declaration of NATO and the European Union adopted at the summit in Warsaw. “We are talking about how to implement this Declaration, especially how to fight against hybrid and cyber threats, cyber and the joint operations” – said Witold Waszczykowski. The head of Polish diplomacy stressed that NATO and the European Union should use their forces and should not compete with each other.

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