
Interview: Monsignor Ladas Tulaba

Gorbachov's perestroika is poised in the balance in Baltic republics

by Maria Cristina Fiocchi

The Baltic Council's appeal to the United Nations, in response to the harsh stance taken by the Communist Party of the Soviet Union against those people's legitimate demands, denounces the attempt to "foment distrust" among the Russian people against the Baltic countries. The CPSU's hard line raises serious questions about the future of perestroika in those countries.

We spoke with Msgr. Ladas Tulaba, former rector of the Pontifical Lithuanian College in Rome, and an expert on the Eastern European nations.

EIR: You have just come back from a trip to Lithuania after 42 years of forced absence. How have you found your country changed?

Tulaba: I left Rome on Alitalia, and we arrived at about 5 p.m. local time in Moscow. The passport control was so incredibly fast that I got done before the person who was supposed to pick me up in Moscow could get there. From the international airport I then went to the local airport by taxi. The taxi driver immediately asked if I wanted to change money, which obviously I did not do because it is forbidden. I got to the ticket counter. At 7:15 the plane was supposed to leave for Vilnius and there was no clerk, but there were a lot of people waiting. Here I had my first surprise, because I discovered that they were all my compatriots, but the other surprise was that no one knew whether we would take off, or when. I was thirsty, so I asked if it were possible to buy something to drink or eat, but there was nothing. There were people sleeping on the floor of the waiting room—a pitiful sight.

I went to another waiting room, and they gave me my boarding pass. I asked if the plane would leave and they said no, because in Vilnius the weather was bad. Later I found out this was not true. Finally the person who had come to pick me up arrived, and I asked him to get information. I wanted to call Vilnius and let my relatives know, who were waiting at the airport, but there was no way to communicate with Vilnius. The plane still did not leave and I started to feel ill.

My companion, worried, made it known that a scandal could break out: a Vatican figure getting sick in Moscow. So then something changed. They put us in a car and took us to a plane sitting on the runway, and not long after, the others were also boarded.

I told you this brief episode to give you an idea of the situation in the East: On the one hand there is undoubtedly political change, but on the other there is misery, disorder, and disarray. The economic situation and not just the economic situation, the whole system has completely collapsed.

EIR: What are people saying?

Tulaba: Naturally people say that you can't go on this way. So Gorbachov is forced to make *perestroika*, something has to be changed in the system, they have to do something, they don't know what, and I don't think even Gorbachov knows. Sure, this situation grants a certain autonomy to the Baltic Republics, an economic autonomy to save themselves from the collapse. But even this, I don't know how much it will work.

EIR: What is the situation in Lithuania?

Tulaba: In Lithuania there is a change. Before everything was Russian, and now everything is Lithuanian. The Communist Lithuanian government is no longer pro-Soviet—it is anti-Soviet. Certainly the contacts with Moscow are close, because Moscow runs everything, but the Lithuanian government finds it hard to carry out economic reforms because people are not used to working.

EIR: What is the status of relations between the government and the Church?

Tulaba: Even Church-state relations have changed enormously in Lithuania. The government helps the Church, it is giving back de-consecrated churches, and restoring them. The cathedral of Vilnius is a marvel, it has been perfectly restored. They are also restoring the church I love so much, St. John at the university, which is a Baroque jewel in Sicilian marble, because Vilnius is a Baroque city built by Italian

artists and architects, with material brought in from Italy. For this church the government has now spent 18 million rubles, restoring it with pure gold. There are still some problems for the Church, but the Lithuanian government is no longer making problems, and to the degree possible it tries to meet us halfway.

The people in Lithuania are behaving differently from the way they acted in 1940-42; they smile, they talk without fear, there is criticism even on television.

EIR: What do the Soviets think?

Tulaba: The Soviets are in difficulty, yes, but they are still an empire. Many in the Communist Party no longer believe in Communism, but they continue to be imperialist and in seeing the empire unravel they cannot stay still, so there is the danger that something could happen. Even in Lithuania they are convinced of this and are afraid. If—I hope to God this does not happen—things were to turn backward, life would become impossible.

The Soviets work with discretion; I was allowed to circulate freely and to go wherever I wanted in Vilnius, but always under a certain observation. I met all my relatives. The immense joy of seeing them again was mixed with sorrow when I learned that almost all of them have spent 10

years in Siberia. When I asked why, they answered, “We don’t even know why ourselves.”

The countryside made me sad. I remember a flourishing agriculture. Now it is all abandoned. Security is solidly in the Soviets’ hands and they are not becoming fewer, but rather are building up their police forces. They justify this by saying they want to protect the people from criminals, but I don’t believe it. In the city of Vilnius alone in the last few days, more than 1,300 new police and about 60 officers arrived.

EIR: What is the danger?

Tulaba: The formation of too many political groups. Perhaps the Soviets are encouraging them to arise, in order to divide them and set them against each other. This is a grave danger. In my view right now the Lithuanians should have only one party, the Lithuanian party, and not form Socialist, Christian Democratic, and other parties, because the dangers are great and diverse. Still, what has happened is a true miracle. I think that even in the U.S.S.R. they will have to change something if the opposition is not going to overturn the whole thing and impose a new Stalinism which this time would be even worse.

EIR: What is the Tiananmen effect?

Tulaba: It is experienced in various ways. There is always uncertainty. The passage from a system which is so rigid, to an almost pluralistic one, is very hard.

EIR: And the Masonry?

Tulaba: This Sąjudis (“front” in Lithuanian) which is leading the Lithuanian political movement has a compass as its coat of arms, a Masonic symbol. Is that what we’ve come to? I don’t know, but I know that the Masonry wants to take power.

EIR: What is your judgment after this brief experience?

Tulaba: We must be very cautious in making judgments and we have to be very much on the inside, not to err and to judge correctly. After this experience I pray every day that we will arrive at a slow evolution, which is not violent, and at a real change also in the U.S.S.R., because the Russian people are good and have suffered a lot, and now the people are demanding, they can’t take it anymore. At the Moscow airport, as I was waiting, many asked to have their picture taken with me; they were happy to see a priest, because they had not seen one for years. I would say that the wind of the Holy Spirit is blowing even there.

I think Gorbachov is not playing a double game, but that he has been forced to take the road he has taken. I am more afraid of Yeltsin, even though he presents himself as a more radical reformer. He is a typical Russian nationalist. Yeltsin has a following and this nationalist following is very dangerous.

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