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JUSTICE DEPARTMENT WELCOMES WWII GENOCIDE CONVICTION IN LITHUANIA
OF FORMER FLORIDA RESIDENT

A Justice Department official today welcomed the conviction yesterday on genocide charges in Vilnius, Lithuania, of Kazys Gimzauskas, a former resident of St. Petersburg, Florida.

Gimzauskas, 93, was found guilty yesterday of committing genocide during his service as the second-ranking official in the German-sponsored Lithuanian Security Police in Nazi-occupied Vilnius Province during World War II. Gimzauskas was specifically found to have handed over Jews for execution. His conviction constitutes the first Holocaust-related conviction in any successor state to the former Soviet Union. One of Gimzauskas' victims, a 42-year-old woman arrested "on suspicion of being a Jew," was born in the United States.

Gimzauskas was initially identified and investigated by the Justice Department's Office of Special Investigations (OSI), which brought suit in federal district court in 1995 to have his naturalized U.S. citizenship revoked. In 1996, after Gimzauskas fled to Lithuania, a judgment of denaturalization was obtained against him by OSI.

Since Lithuania regained its independence, in 1991, the importance of prosecuting perpetrators such as Gimzauskas has repeatedly been stressed by senior White House, State Department and Justice Department officials, and by members of Congress, in meetings with Lithuanian officials. Lithuania's failure to prosecute any such cases was publicly criticized by the United States Government in 1998.

OSI provided Lithuanian prosecutors with the captured wartime documents, many of them signed by Gimzauskas, that provided the key evidence underlying yesterday's conviction. Michael C. MacQueen, OSI's Chief of Investigative Research, found the documents in archives in Lithuania in the early 1990's.

OSI Director Eli M. Rosenbaum today termed Gimzauskas' conviction "a landmark accomplishment for the Lithuanian Prosecutor General's Office and a victory, however belated, for the rule of law." He stressed the critical role played by Rimvydas Valentukevicius, the Chief of the Special Investigations Section, who personally prosecuted the case in Vilnius. "We hope that this is only the first in a series of successful prosecutions to be mounted by Lithuanian authorities in these enormously important and obviously time-sensitive cases," Rosenbaum added.

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