

# Appointment of Vytautas Čekanauskas as Honorary Consul General of Lithuania in Los Angeles in 1977: Behind the Scenes

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*Abstract.* In the context of Lithuania's occupation and annexation of 1940–1990, the Lithuanian Diplomatic Service and the leaders of the Lithuanian émigré community tried to maintain the functionality of Lithuanian representations abroad, which was crucial for Lithuanians in political, moral and national terms. The change of diplomats was a difficult, yet successful, process involving members of the Lithuanian community in emigration, who met the applicable criteria. The documents of the Lithuanian Diplomatic Service which are already available to researchers (correspondence among Chief of the Lithuanian Diplomatic Service Stasys Lozoraitis, Lithuanian representative in Washington, Dr. Stasys A. Bačkis and Lithuanian Consul General in New York Anicetas Simutis) enable us to reveal the complex process of the change of representatives in a single (inter alia) Lithuanian representation, i.e. Honorary Consulate General in Los Angeles. To find a replacement for the late Honorary Consul General Julius J. Bielskis (1891–1976), the process of appointment of engineer Vytautas Čekanauskas (1929–2009) and his recognition by the U.S. government took place in 1977. The leaders of émigré organizations and individuals got engaged in this process on a rather broad scale by proposing their candidates to the Lithuanian Diplomatic Service, which often involved humiliation of other candidates and increased polarization of the community. It prolonged the appointment of the new consul for a long period of time. On 6 October, the U.S. Department of State recognized Čekanauskas as Lithuanian Honorary Consul General in Los Angeles.

*Keywords:* Vytautas Čekanauskas, Honorary Consul General, 1977, Lithuanian Diplomatic Service, Los Angeles Lithuanians, Stasys Lozoraitis, Stasys A. Bačkis, Anicetas Simutis.

*Anotacija.* Lietuvos okupacijos ir aneksijos 1940–1990 m. sąlygomis Lietuvos diplomatinė tarnyba ir lietuvių išeivijos vadovai stengėsi, kad Lietuvos atstovybės užsienyje ir toliau funkcionuotų, – tai turėjo politinę, moralinę ir tautinę reikšmę lietuviams. Sunkiai, bet sėkmingai vyko diplomatų kaita, įtraukiant lietuvių išeivijos atstovus, kurie atitiko jiems keliamus kriterijus. Jau mokslininkams prieinami LDT dokumentai (LDT šefo Stasio Lozoraičio, Lietuvos atstovo Vašingtone dr. Stasio A. Bačkio ir Lietuvos generalinio konsulo Niujorke Aniceto Simučio susirašinėjimas) leidžia atskleisti sudėtingą atstovų kaitos procesą vienoje (tarp kitų) Lietuvos atstovybėje – garbės generaliniame konsulate Los Andžele. Vietoje mirusio garbės generalinio konsulo Juliaus J. Bielskio (1891–1976) 1977 m. vyko inžinieriaus Vytauto Čekanausko (1929–2009) skyrimo ir JAV valdžios pripažinimo procesas. Į jį gana plačiai buvo įsitraukę išeivijos organizacijų vadovai ir pavieniai asmenys: Lietuvos diplomatinei tarnybai jie siūlė savo kandidatus, neretai juodindami kitus, gilindami susipriešinimą. Tai ilgam užtęsė naujo konsulo paskyrimą. Spalio 6 d. JAV valstybės departamentas pripažino V. Čekanauską Lietuvos garbės generaliniu konsulu Los Andžele.

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*Esminiai žodžiai:* Vytautas Čekanauskas, garbės generalinis konsulas, 1977 m., Lietuvos diplomatinė tarnyba, Los Andželo lietuviai, Stasys Lozoraitis, Stasys A. Bačkis, Anicetas Simutis.

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## Introduction

Operating in the conditions of exile after World War II and during the Cold War, *the Lithuanian Diplomatic Service* (hereinafter – the LDS) and the leaders of the Lithuanian émigré community were driven by the major political goal to maintain the non-recognition policy of Lithuania's annexation in the governments of Western states and, naturally, first of all in the United States of America. The continuous promise secured from U.S. presidents not to recognize the occupation of Lithuania and other Baltic states was illustrated by the operation, even though symbolic, of Lithuanian, Latvian and Estonian representations – legations, consulates and honorary consulates. They were important for Lithuanian, Latvian and Estonian émigré communities as they strengthened hope to live to see the restored statehood of their country. It is not by accident that these representations were called 'lights of independence'.

Naturally, the issue of representations of the Baltic states would continuously arise in the relations and negotiations between the U.S. and the USSR. In fact, it was not convenient for U.S. politicians with the view to ameliorating the relations between these countries. While negotiating, Americans would express their position that the representations of the former Baltic states would exist as long as the representatives assigned by the heads of those former states were alive. It sounded rather dangerously, because the diplomats who served in the representations were rather old-aged. Such a situation forced the LDT and émigré leaders to consider how to maintain the functioning of the representations

for as long as possible, considering that, as one diplomat vividly put it, it was “hanging by a thread”.

The revision of the above position taken by the U.S. with respect to the Baltic representations was influenced by the occasional deterioration of the U.S.-USSR relations. Lithuanian, Latvian and Estonian diplomatic services and Lithuanian émigré organizations used to take advantage of it. It was only after Ronald Reagan was elected the President of the U.S. that the risky position according to which new career envoys and consuls of the Baltic states were not approved was changed<sup>1</sup>. The personnel of the representations could already be renewed from among the Lithuanian émigré community. The situation of honorary consuls was easier, because a U.S. citizen could also be elected an honorary consul. But there was also no guarantee that he or she would be approved. Efforts had to be made. Besides, certain obstacles would also arise on the part of Lithuanian émigrés.

We already have a study of more general type dedicated to the activities of the LDS in 1940–1990<sup>2</sup>; several monographs have been published on the diplomatic service of the chiefs of the LDS, Stasys Lozoraitis and Dr. Stasys Antanas Bačkis<sup>3</sup>. Lithuanian representatives in Washington<sup>4</sup>, certain career and honorary consuls in Chicago, New York, Boston and Los Angeles have also drawn certain scholarly attention<sup>5</sup>. Out of the five honorary consuls (Julius Jonas Bielskis, Antanas Osvaldas Šalna, Juzė Daužvardienė, Vytautas Čekanauskas, Vaclovas Kleiza) who served in the U.S. under the conditions of annexed Lithuania the activities of Lithuanian Honorary Consul General in Los Angeles Vytautas Čekanauskas (1929–2009) have not so far attracted the attention of historians. It may also be due to the fact that he continued his diplomatic service during the years of the restored state of Lithuania until his death. In fact, his activities were rather broadly covered by the Lithuanian American press; certain hints may also be found in the

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<sup>1</sup> PETRAITYTĖ-BRIEDIENĖ, Asta. *Tylieji priesaikos riteriai. Lietuvos pasiuntinybė Vašingtone Šaltojo karo metais*. Vilnius: Versus aureus, 2014, p. 102.

<sup>2</sup> JANUŠAUSKAS, Laurynas. *Likimo vedami: Lietuvos diplomatinės tarnybos egzilyje veikla 1940–1991*. Vilnius: Lietuvos gyventojų genocido ir rezistencijos tyrimo centras, 2003. 416 p.

<sup>3</sup> VASILIAUSKIENĖ, Aldona. *Stasio Antano Bačkio gyvenimo ir veiklos bruožai*. Vilnius: Lietuvių katalikų mokslo akademija, 1996. 120 p.; STREIKUS, Arūnas. *Diplomatas Stasys Antanas Bačkis*. Vilnius: Lietuvos gyventojų genocido ir rezistencijos tyrimo centras, 2007. 292 p.; PETRAITYTĖ-BRIEDIENĖ, Asta. *Lietuvos diplomatinės tarnybos šefas Stasys Lozoraitis (1940–1983)*. Vilnius: Versus aureus, 2012. 408 p.

<sup>4</sup> PETRAITYTĖ-BRIEDIENĖ, Asta. *Tylieji priesaikos riteriai. Lietuvos pasiuntinybė Vašingtone Šaltojo karo metais*. Vilnius: Versus aureus, 2014. 248 p.

<sup>5</sup> JANUŠAUSKAS, Laurynas; KLEIZA, Vaclovas. *Lietuvos konsulatas Čikagoje 1924–2004 metais. Dokumentuose ir nuotraukose*. Chicago Il: Lithuanian Research and Studies Center, 2004. 138 p.; SKIRIUS, Juozas. *Julius J. Bielskis (1891–1976). Gyvenimas Amerikoje tarnaujant Lietuvai: JAV lietuvių veikėjas ir diplomatas*. Chicago Il: Lithuanian Research and Studies Center, 2004. 259 p. (antrasis leidimas 2008 m. Vilniuje); SKIRIUS, Juozas. Anicetas Simutis – paskutinis prieškarinio Lietuvos diplomatas. In: *Anicetas Simutis: 60 metų Lietuvos diplomatinėje tarnyboje*. Sud. Rimantas Morkvėnas ir Laima Sruoginis. Vilnius: Lietuvos gyventojų genocido ir rezistencijos tyrimo centras, 2007, p. 9–64; SKIRIUS, Juozas. Žinoma ir nežinoma Lietuvos garbės konsulo Bostone Antano Osvaldo Šalnos veikla (1939–1971). *Istorija: mokslo darbai*, 2016, t. 102, Nr. 2, p. 29–52.

aforementioned studies. His appointment as Honorary Consul General is to a certain extent covered in the monograph dedicated to Consul J. J. Bielskis<sup>6</sup>.

Every Lithuanian representative, whether in the U.S. or elsewhere, made a valuable contribution to the restoration of the independent state of Lithuania and the strengthening of the idea of statehood in the émigré community and even in annexed Lithuania during the period which was politically unfavourable to our country. It is therefore meaningful to find out their activity fields, efforts and achievements. A very important and complex question is concerned with the efforts of the LDS to maintain the continuity of existing Lithuanian representations and the appointment of new individuals as representatives already coming from the Lithuanian émigré community. Of course, as regards their appointment, we have to realize what people could apply to vacant consular posts, what conditions they had to meet, what role was played by the Lithuanian community in emigration and its leaders. This article is an attempt to discuss the above based on the example of Vytautas Čekanauskas who was appointed Honorary Consul General in Los Angeles in 1977.

The archives of diplomacy, which are already available to researchers, allow us to see the complex processes in the attempt to keep the functioning of independent representations under the conditions of occupied Lithuania. The principal documentary source is the documents of the Lithuanian Legation in Washington (F. 656), the Consulate General in New York (F. 658) and Chief of the LDS Stasys Lozoraitis (F. 668) kept at the Lithuanian Central State Archives (hereinafter – LCSA). They include the secret correspondence among Chief of the LDS Stasys Lozoraitis, Lithuanian representative in Washington, Dr. Stasys A. Bačkis and Lithuanian Consul General in New York Anicetas Simutis, the correspondence with Lithuanian Americans and Vytautas Čekanauskas. The analysis of documents, the comparison and evaluation of the positions taken by diplomats, Lithuanian American organizations and their leaders relating to the candidates for the consul's position under the conditions of that time will enable us to reveal a complex process in an endeavour to preserve the continuity of representation in Los Angeles.

## **Emergence of the candidate for the position of Honorary Consul General**

After J. J. Bielskis (1891–1976), the first long-year Honorary Consul General of Lithuania, passed away in Los Angeles on 26 December 1976, a question immediately emerged in the LDS and the émigré community who would take the vacant position. At the beginning of January 1977, Lithuanian representative in Washington, Dr. S. A. Bačkis sent Anicetas Simutis, Lithuanian Consul General in New York, to J. J. Bielskis' funeral.

<sup>6</sup> SKIRIUS Juozas. *Julius J. Bielskis (1891–1976). Gyvenimas Amerikoje tarnaujant Lietuvai: JAV lietuvių veikėjas ir diplomatas*. Vilnius: Edukologija, 2008, p. 229–231.

Besides, he was also authorized “to investigate with discretion what the colony of Los Angeles Lithuanians would like to propose to the position of Lithuania’s Honorary Consul General in Los Angeles if the U.S. Government agrees to recognize the consul”<sup>7</sup>. Hence, we can see the concern of Lithuanian diplomats about the continuity of activities of the honorary consul in Los Angeles. It should be noted that the Latvians and Estonians of Los Angeles were also concerned about this matter. When Simutis met Ernst Lauer, Estonian Honorary Consul, in Los Angeles, the Estonian advised him to do everything in his power to preserve the Lithuanian Honorary Consulate General in Los Angeles. According to him, it would indeed be very strange if Lithuanians whose population was more numerous in Los Angeles than that of Estonians and Latvians taken together would not have their consulate<sup>8</sup>.

Unfortunately, it was not possible to clarify this matter with discretion, i.e. secretly, not publicly. As it was acknowledged by Consul Anicetas Simutis, on his arrival in Los Angeles, “every person I met would first of all ask who would take the place of late J. J. Bielskis”. In response to that, Simutis was forced to ask Lithuanians themselves to recommend the candidates that the chief of the LDS could choose from<sup>9</sup>. It was a mistake. Such a way of solving the problem brought a certain negative element – it stirred up polarization among Lithuanians in California, as they started proposing their potential candidates for the consul’s position on a rather broad scale.

On departure from Los Angeles, Simutis already had several proposals. Alena Devėinienė, a Lithuanian public figure, recommended several persons who had certain work contacts with the services of the former Lithuanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs: Stasys J. Paltus, Jonas Kutra and Hypatija Petkuvienė-Yčaitė. (In fact, it turned out later that they had almost no contacts with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs). Other more active Lithuanians, such as engineer Vytautas Čekanauskas, well-off householder Kazys Karuža and actor Rūta Lee-Kilmonytė, were also proposed as candidates. Jonas Kučingis, Pastor of Lithuanian St. Casimir Parish of Los Angeles, offered two candidates – engineer Čekanauskas and lawyer, Dr. Nida Žibutė Brinkienė<sup>10</sup>.

After returning to New York and summarizing the information collected, Simutis made a conclusion that the honorary consul general – “an agile and energetic assistant” – was necessary in Los Angeles. Out of all the candidates proposed, “engineer Vytautas Čekanauskas, the most suitable candidate in all respects,” could take this position. At that time, this candidate was 48 years old; he was fluent in Lithuanian and English, economically well-off and financially capable of “maintaining the dignity appropriate

<sup>7</sup> Transcript of the confidential letter of S. A. Bačkis to Chief of the LDS Stasys Lozoraitis, 29 December 1976. *LCVA*, f. 656, ap. 2, b. 123, l. 69.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, ap. 1, b. 32, l. 237.

<sup>9</sup> SKIRIUS, Juozas. *Julius J. Bielskis (1891–1976). Gyvenimas Amerikoje tarnaujant Lietuvai: JAV lietuvių veikėjas ir diplomatas*. Vilnius: Edukologija, 2008, p. 229.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

to the consulate”. His wife Janina was an artist and singer. They raised three daughters in their family, who attended the Lithuanian Saturday school, and everyone spoke Lithuanian at home. Čekanauskas’ relations with the immigrants of the older generation (first-generation immigrants, the so called ‘greenhorns’ (Lith. grynoriai)) were unusually friendly<sup>11</sup>. It truly impressed the consul. Once, after the sacred service and the meeting at the parish hall, Čekanauskas took Simutis to the Lithuanian club of the first-generation Lithuanian immigrants in Los Angeles where a New Year party was taking place. During the meeting the consul observed that Čekanauskas got along with the old Lithuanians really well, and “this does not appear to be the case with the younger and older generation public figures of most of other colonies”<sup>12</sup>. Considering that the relations between the greenhorns (first- and second-generation Lithuanian immigrants before World War II) and displaced persons (Lith. dipukai, the third-generation Lithuanian immigrants after World War II) did not always run smoothly, the favourable approach of the greenhorns towards Čekanauskas could not remain unnoticed by Simutis. The consul observed yet another quality. During the meeting, which heard out the report of the refugee Brazinskis family, Čekanauskas “spoke and headed the meeting smoothly and effectively. He was well aware of the Brazinskis family situation”<sup>13</sup>. It meant that the candidate had the qualities of the leader and organizer, and was well-aware of the political situation.

Simutis noted that Čekanauskas was an active public figure – chairman of the Lithuanian American Council (hereinafter – LAC), Los Angeles division (LAC united several dozen Lithuanian American organizations), vice-chairman of the United Lithuanian Relief Fund of America (hereinafter – ULRFA), Los Angeles division; he belonged to several American organizations, e.g. American Legion; he was also a member of the Captive Nations Committee, chairman of the Los Angeles Committee of the Ethnic Festival, representing 64 nations in organizing the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Independence of the United States of America celebration. It was observed that he also had contacts and a good reputation in the government of Los Angeles. What is more, Consul Bielskis had proposed to appoint Čekanauskas “Honorary Consular Attaché for Press Affairs” as far back as 1971<sup>14</sup>.

Such concise characteristics provided by Anicetas Simutis paved the way for his future, though not immediate, diplomatic career. It did not happen immediately, because the members of the Lithuanian American community proved to be really active in trying to push their candidates to the forefront and, unfortunately, humiliating others. This polarised the community and stirred up hostility towards each other.

<sup>11</sup> SKIRIUS, Juozas. *Julius J. Bielskis (1891–1976). Gyvenimas Amerikoje tarnaujant Lietuvai: JAV lietuvių veikėjas ir diplomatas*. Vilnius: Edukologija, 2008, p. 229.

<sup>12</sup> Confidential Pro Memoria of Anicetas Simutis to Stasys Lozoraitis in Rome and S. A. Bačkis in Washington No. 27/45-B, 13 January 1977. LCVA, f. 668, ap. 1, b. 74, l. 3.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> Confidential letter of S. A. Bačkis to Stasys Lozoraitis in Rome No. 150, 8 February 1977. LCVA, f. 668, ap. 1, b. 74, l. 13.

Anicetas Simutis urged Chief of the LDS Stasys Lozoraitis and Lithuanian envoy S. A. Bačkis to decide on the honorary consul general immediately and take the required steps for his recognition in the U.S. Department of State. The consul warned that “undue delay could lead to the outcomes similar to the cease of existence of the Lithuanian consulate in Boston” after the death of the honorary consul, lawyer Antanas O. Šalna<sup>15</sup>. However, an immediate decision could not be taken.

## Positions of Lithuanian Americans

Apparently, the Los Angeles Lithuanian community, in particular its leaders, already felt that Čekanauskas was the most realistic candidate for this post. Some did not like it. Dissatisfaction was even apparent among the leaders of the Lithuanian American Community. It was influenced by the long-standing disputes between the Lithuanian American Community and the Lithuanian American Council over priority in political activities. The personality of Čekanauskas got between the two millstones as well. On 16 January 1977, S. A. Bačkis received a call from Algimantas Gečys, Chairman of the Central Board of the Lithuanian American Community, who reported that Simutis' visit caused a huge stir among Los Angeles Lithuanians and there was fierce opposition against Čekanauskas' candidacy. According to Gečys, the opposition put forward two more candidates: physician, Prof. Dr. Jonas Stasys Žmuidzinas and one of the most well-off Lithuanians Algis Raulinaitis<sup>16</sup>, who soon cancelled his candidacy. To confirm his words, on 27 January, Gečys sent an official letter (with annexes) to S. A. Bačkis indicating that on 24 January he was contacted by Vice President of the National Executive Committee of the Lithuanian American Community for U.S. Western States Jonas Činga living in Los Angeles. He, i.e. Činga, “having considered all the potential candidates and discussed the matter with competent persons”, recommended Dr. J. S. Žmuidzinas residing in Glendale, California<sup>17</sup>. At the same time, the opposition to Čekanauskas' candidacy was also expressed by Los Angeles Lithuanian journalist Juozas Kojelis, the figure of the Lithuanian American Community and the *Friends of the Lithuanian Front*. In his personal letter to Dr. S. A. Bačkis of 26 January he characterized Čekanauskas as “a small-caliber party figure ... the confidant of the President of the Lithuanian American Council ...

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<sup>15</sup> Confidential Pro Memoria of Anicetas Simutis to Stasys Lozoraitis in Rome and S. A. Bačkis in Washington No. 27/45-B, 13 January 1977. LCVA, f. 668, ap. 1, b. 74, l. 4.

<sup>16</sup> Confidential letter of S. A. Bačkis to Stasys Lozoraitis in Rome, 17 January 1977. LCVA, f. 668, ap. 1, b. 74, l. 12.

<sup>17</sup> Letter of Algimantas Gečys to S. A. Bačkis, 27 January 1977 (a photocopy forwarded to Stasys Lozoraitis on 8 February). Ibid., l. 14; Letter of Jonas Činga to Algimantas Gečys in Philadelphia, 24 January 1977. Ibid., l. 15–16.

a true outsider in the community”. He favoured Dr. J. S. Žmuidzinai, who was “a firm Lithuanian, sufficiently active and not bound by any ideological-political movement”<sup>18</sup>.

As a response to the position expressed by the Lithuanian American Community, the members of 18 organizations and societies of Los Angeles Lithuanians, who gathered to a meeting on 17 February, wrote Lozoraitis, Dr. S. A. Bačkis and Simutis and expressed their wish to see Čekanauskas as a consul by repeatedly listing his strengths and advantages over other candidates.

On 24 February, Simutis wrote a confidential letter to Lozoraitis as a reaction to the recommendation of the Lithuanian American Community concerning the candidacy of Dr. J. S. Žmuidzinai. He noted that Čekanauskas also belonged to the Lithuanian American Community and even took the leading positions. By acknowledging Dr. J. S. Žmuidzinai’s scientific achievements, he highlighted that as active public figure as possible was required for the honorary consul’s position; Čekanauskas was exactly such a person. Besides, Simutis reminded that he would first have to engage in close cooperation with the honorary consul in Los Angeles. He therefore asked to take his, i.e. Simutis’, opinion into account<sup>19</sup>.

At the start of March, Lozoraitis was informed that the following candidates were repeatedly proposed: Dr. N. Ž. Binkienė, actor Rūta Lee and Čekanauskas two more times. The chief of the LDS did not see anything wrong in the emergence of more candidacies. He wished to have as much information as possible about all of them. According to him, the principal condition was the following: “We have to make sure that the candidate is not involved in any current community debates or similar polemics.”<sup>20</sup> Encouraged by Los Angeles Lithuanian organizations and Consul General Anicetas Simutis, on 2 March 1977, Vytautas Čekanauskas wrote a letter to Stasys Lozoraitis expressing his agreement to stand as a candidate accompanied by his biography the copies of which were sent to S. A. Bačkis and Simutis<sup>21</sup>. As far as it can be inferred from archival documents, he was the first candidate to communicate his agreement to Lithuanian diplomats personally. Besides, he provided Lithuanian diplomats with the information on his material status<sup>22</sup>, showing that he would be capable of maintaining the Lithuanian Honorary Consulate General in Los Angeles at his own expense.

On 28 February, Algimantas Gečys, Chairman of the Central Board of the Lithuanian American Community, trying to insure himself against the refusal of Dr. J. S. Žmuidzinai’s

<sup>18</sup> Letter of Juozas Kojelis containing personal information to S. A. Bačkis in Washington, 26 January 1977. *Ibid.*, f. 656, ap. 2, b. 123, l. 142.

<sup>19</sup> Confidential letter of Anicetas Simutis to Stasys Lozoraitis in Rome No. 342/45-B, 24 February 1977 (transcript sent to S. A. Bačkis). *LCVA*, f. 668, ap. 1, b. 74, l. 24–25.

<sup>20</sup> Skirius J. *Julius J. Bielskis (1891–1976). Gyvenimas Amerikoje tarnaujant Lietuvai: JAV lietuvių veikėjas ir diplomatas*. Vilnius: Edukologija, 2008, p. 230.

<sup>21</sup> Letter of Vytautas Čekanauskas to Stasys Lozoraitis in Rome, 2 March 1977 (received on 8 March). *LCVA*, f. 668, ap. 1, b. 74, l. 34; Biography of Vytautas Čekanauskas. *Ibid.*, l. 35–37.

<sup>22</sup> Letter of Vytautas Čekanauskas to S. A. Bačkis in Washington, 11 March 1977. *Ibid.*, l. 64.



candidacy for any reason, sent a letter to Dr. S. A. Bačkis recommending lawyer, Dr. Nida Ž. Binkienė and enclosing exhaustive information on her professional activities<sup>23</sup>. On 12 February, her candidacy was supported by Leonardas Valiukas, one of the founders of *American for Congressional Action to Free the Baltic States*, who wrote in the letter to Dr. S. A. Bačkis that Dr. N. Ž. Binkienė's "activities in Lithuanian and American organizations are broad and versatile ... She stands out among all other individuals in the West of the U.S. by her qualifications"<sup>24</sup>. A serious candidate and competitor to Čekanauskas was emerging. Simutis again said his word. It turned out that Dr. N. Ž. Brinkienė was the protégé of the *Friends of the Lithuanian Front*<sup>25</sup>. In his private letter to Stasys Lozoraitis stationed in Rome Consul Simutis noted that "being a member of the *Friends of the Lithuanian Front* organization, Gečys offers the honorary consul's post to the vice-president of this organization in Los Angeles". The consul expressed his resentment saying that "no matter how it is, to my mind, such a procedure is not right"<sup>26</sup>. Such a consul's position apparently also influenced Lozoraitis' decision. Besides, Dr. S. A. Bačkis was privately informed by Kojelis about the divorce of Dr. N. Z. Binkienė and her husband. In fact, he explained that the divorce went peacefully; they both did not start new families<sup>27</sup>. No doubt, such a marital status was not to her advantage. In his letter Kojelis agreed with the Lithuanian envoy that Dr. J. S. Žmuidzinai's lack of US citizenship might be an obstacle for him to stand as a candidate. Without mentioning Čekanauskas, Kojelis proposed that if a Lithuanian honorary consul could not be found, "perhaps it would be worthwhile to look for an American candidate?". He recommended congressman Alphonzo Bell, who had certain ties with Lithuanians<sup>28</sup>. However, the question of foreign candidates was no longer considered among Lithuanian diplomats. This candidacy was not of much interest. It was not worth considering because, apparently, the unpleasant experience of

<sup>23</sup> Letter of Algimantas Gečys from Philadelphia to S. A. Bačkis in Washington, 28 February 1977. *Ibid.*, l. 42.

<sup>24</sup> SKIRIUS, Juozas. *JAV lietuvių darbai Lietuvai 1918–2018 metais*. Vilnius: „Savas takas“, 2018, p. 214–215; Letter of Leonardas Valiukas from Los Angeles to S. A. Bačkis in Washington, 12 February 1977. *LCVA*, f. 656, ap. 2, b. 123, l. 93.

<sup>25</sup> A Lithuanian American political organization continuing the traditions of the Lithuanian Front, which was active in 1941–1944. Founded in 1951, it has been organizing study and leisure weeks for Lithuanian Americans since 1957. In 1960, the fund *Į laisvę* (Towards Freedom) for the development of the Lithuanian culture was established in Chicago. The *Friends of the Lithuanian Front* (LFB) contributed to the establishment of the Lithuanian World Community and supported unofficial initiatives of the liberation of Lithuania that were not supported by the Supreme Committee for the Liberation of Lithuania: Committee for Support of Resolutions (1961); in 1981, it provided financial support to the Baltic American Freedom League. The Lithuanian Foundation was established in 1962 on the initiative of the LFB; in 1953–1992, it published the magazine *Į laisvę*. From 1990, the LFB further functioned in Lithuania. *Lietuvių fronto bičiuliai. (Visuotinė lietuvių enciklopedija)*. Vilnius: MELI, 2008, t. 13, p. 161.)

<sup>26</sup> Private letter of Anicetas Simutis from New York to Stasys Lozoraitis in Rome, 17 March 1977. *LCVA*, f. 668, ap. 1. b. 74, l. 62.

<sup>27</sup> Letter of Juozas Kojelis from Santa Monica to S. A. Bačkis in Washington, 18 March 1977. *LCVA*, f. 656, ap. 2, b. 123, l. 134.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

Latvians also played a role. American lawyer Leo Ellis Anderson appointed as far back as 19 February 1932 served as Latvian Honorary Consul in Los Angeles. The leaders of the Latvian colony complained that he did not keep contact with the Latvian colony and rarely showed up in their events<sup>29</sup>.

It was only on 7 April 1977, when Lozoraitis, having summed up all pros and cons, decided on the candidacy of Vytautas Čekanauskas<sup>30</sup>. Besides, this candidacy was also supported by Prelate, Msgr. Ladas Tulaba, Rector of the College of St. Casimir in Rome. He was asked to evaluate the candidacy as an independent observer. The prelate was impressed by Čekanauskas' nonpartisanship: "He is neither a Christian Democrat nor a *frontininkas*. He is not affiliated with any party". We should also bear in mind that a firm support expressed by President of the Lithuanian American Council, Dr. Kazys Bobelis to Čekanauskas' candidacy played a role as well<sup>31</sup>. Whereas Simutis expressed his firm support to Čekanauskas' candidacy from the very beginning by highlighting that it was better to support such a candidate who had the support of the majority in society<sup>32</sup>, Dr. S. A. Bačkis took a neutral position for a long time and did not rush to express his support. It again showed his undue cautiousness, which had always been characteristic of him. He only noted in his letter to Lozoraitis of 1 August that he continuously received letters on the issue of Čekanauskas' candidacy, both supporting and opposing it. However, according to Bačkis, "I no longer pay much attention to it, because we have no other serious candidate (except for Čekanauskas – author's note). So everything will depend on the Department of State whose reply I am expecting to get."<sup>33</sup> It is interesting to note that Lithuanian diplomats did not name their chosen candidate for the Honorary Consul General's post until the candidate's approval by the U.S. Department of State. They were laconic in replying to inquiries: "The candidacies are under consideration". They simply tried to avoid premature unfavourable comments which could be detrimental to the selected candidacy.

<sup>29</sup> Confidential Pro Memoria of Anicetas Simutis to Stasys Lozoraitis in Rome and S. A. Bačkis in Washington No. 27/45-B, 13 January 1977. *LCVA*, f. 668, ap. 1, b. 74, l. 2.

<sup>30</sup> Confidential letter of Stasys Lozoraitis in Rome to Lithuanian representative S. A. Bačkis in Washington, 7 April 1977. *LCVA*, f. 656, ap. 2, b. 123, l. 146.

<sup>31</sup> Transcript of the confidential letter of Stasys Lozoraitis to Washington and New York, 2 May 1977. *LCVA*, f. 668, ap. 1, b. 74, l. 68; Letter of Kazys Bobelis from Chicago to Stasys Lozoraitis in Rome, 24 May 1977. *Ibid.*, l. 69.

<sup>32</sup> Private letter of Anicetas Simutis from New York to Stasys Lozoraitis in Rome, 17 March 1977. *Ibid.*, l. 62.

<sup>33</sup> Letter of S. A. Bačkis from Washington to Stasys Lozoraitis in Rome No. 1119, 1 August 1977 (transcript sent to Anicetas Simutis in New York). *Ibid.*, l. 77.

## Appointment of Vytautas Čekanauskas

The issue of appointment took a long time to resolve. In April, Lithuania's representative in Washington, Dr. S. A. Bačkis, started raising the question of Čekanauskas' recognition at the U.S. Department of State. At that time, the employee of the Department of State responsible for the Baltic states was sent to Europe for several months. Therefore, Dr. S. A. Bačkis did not have a clear answer. It was only on 26 May when he discussed the matter with the responsible employee of the U.S. Department of State, submitted Čekanauskas' biography and asked when he could expect to get the opinion of the Department of State and when he could present the candidate. And only then he hoped to deliver an official letter to the U.S. Department of State and ask recognition for the Lithuanian honorary consul<sup>34</sup>. In fact, the chief of the LDS was not sure until the last moment what position for Čekanauskas to ask – honorary consul general or honorary consul<sup>35</sup>. It was thought that it would be easier to obtain the honorary consul's position. However, there was yet another more tempting circumstance – there was no distinction made between career and honorary consul ranks on the list of the Los Angeles consular corps. It means that it was better to have a higher rank politically, especially considering that *LITHUANIA Consulate General* had been on the Consular List since the old times. Besides, as opposed to the New York consular corps, consuls in Los Angeles received registration plates for their cars bearing *Consular Corps*<sup>36</sup>. On 5 August, an officer of the U.S. Department of State told Dr. S. A. Bačkis that the recognition for the specified candidate as the Lithuanian Honorary Consul General could be requested<sup>37</sup>. The procedures prolonged due to the summer period when most of administration employees were on vacation.

On 26 August 1977, Lithuanian representative, Dr. S. A. Bačkis authorized by Stasys Lozoraitis issued a letter-note to the U.S. Secretary of State reporting that Čekanauskas was appointed Lithuanian Honorary Consul General in Los Angeles, presented Form DS-394 completed by Čekanauskas together with his photograph and asked to award recognition for him<sup>38</sup>. The Lithuanian representative in Washington reminded that the recognition procedure at the U.S. Department of State lasted about six weeks. Hence, on 6 October, the U.S. Department of State replied to the Lithuanian representative in writing that Čekanauskas was recognized as the Honorary Consul General of Lithuania in Los Angeles and sent him a consular status certificate. Dr. S. A. Bačkis informed Čekanauskas

<sup>34</sup> Confidential letter of S. A. Bačkis to Stasys Lozoraitis in Rome No. 785, 31 May 1977. *Ibid.*, l. 70.

<sup>35</sup> Confidential letter of S. A. Bačkis to Stasys Lozoraitis in Rome No. 1119, 1 August 1977. *Ibid.*, l. 77.

<sup>36</sup> Confidential Pro Memoria of Anicetas Simutis to Stasys Lozoraitis in Rome and S. A. Bačkis in Washington No. 27/45-B, 13 January 1977. *LCVA*, f. 668, ap. 1, b. 74, l. 3–4.

<sup>37</sup> Confidential Pro Memoria of S. A. Bačkis to Stasys Lozoraitis in Rome No. 1218, 26 August 1977. *Ibid.*, l. 79.

<sup>38</sup> Note (transcript). *Ibid.*, l. 80.

on the phone the same day and sent him the documents immediately<sup>39</sup>. He was directly subordinate to Anicetas Simutis, Consul General in New York. Besides, he had to resign from all posts in Lithuanian American organizations<sup>40</sup>. A message appeared in the Lithuanian American press that President of the Lithuanian American Council Kazys Bobelis brought the matter of appointment of the honorary consul in Los Angeles at the U.S. Department of State as well<sup>41</sup>. Thus, having lived through “Lithuanian peripeteia” throughout 1977, the continuity of operation of the Lithuanian Honorary Consulate General has been maintained until this day. The appointment of the new Honorary Consul General was broadly covered by the Lithuanian American press. Misleading information appeared in the press as well. Some wrote that the new consul was appointed by the U.S. Department of State. As noted by Simutis, simply speaking, “our editors do not make a distinction between the words ‘appoint’ and ‘recognize’”. Lithuanian representative, Dr. S. A. Bačkis had to clarify the recognition process to the press<sup>42</sup>.

The new colleague was soon instructed and consulted by Dr. S. A. Bačkis and Simutis. Čekanauskas was first instructed to present himself to the Los Angeles *Consular Corps* by writing letters. The sample letter was forwarded to him. He was told not to send letters to the consuls of communist regions. Čekanauskas was warned that not all consuls would send a reply; there would be those who would ignore him. He was advised to remember such consuls for the future, and to engage in close cooperation with the Estonian honorary consul. Besides, he was recommended to attend “the periodic lunches-meetings” organized by the *Consular Corps* whenever possible, as they opened greater opportunities to establish closer relations. He was advised to prepare blanks with the consulate’s address in Los Angeles which would enable him to make do without an office<sup>43</sup>. Čekanauskas received several publications for general reference and for the service as a consul from the Lithuanian Legation in Washington: *Diplomatic Corps*, May 1977; old *Reference Book of the Lithuanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs* (1939), which included the Constitution of 1938 in English, the statute and the law on the service of honorary consuls; several documents received from the U.S. public authorities on human rights and the problem

<sup>39</sup> Letter of S. A. Bačkis from Washington to Stasys Lozoraitis in Rome, No. 1551, 19 October 1977 (transcripts received by Simutis and Daužvardienė). *Ibid.*, l. 83; Ponas Vytautas Čekanauskas pripažintas Lietuvos generaliniu garbės konsulu Los Angeles, Kalifornijoje. *Lietuvių dienos*, 1977, lapkritis, Nr. 9, p. 8; Vytautas Čekanauskas paskirtas Lietuvos generaliniu garbės konsulu. *Lietuviai Amerikos Vakaruose*, 1977, lapkritis, Nr. 11, p. 1.

<sup>40</sup> Confidential letter of S. A. Bačkis to Stasys Lozoraitis in Rome No. 1119, 1 August 1977. *LCVA*, f. 668, ap. 1, b. 74, l. 77.

<sup>41</sup> Dr. Kazys Bobelis tarėsi su atsakingais pareigūnais. *Naujienos*, 1977, rugsėjo 16, Nr. 218, p. 1.

<sup>42</sup> Vytautas Čekanauskas pripažintas Lietuvos generaliniu garbės konsulu Los Angeles, Kalifornijoje. *Laisvoji Lietuva*, 1977, gruodžio 3, Nr. 21, p. 2; Vytautas Čekanauskas paskirtas Lietuvos generaliniu garbės konsulu. *Lietuviai Amerikos Vakaruose*, 1977, lapkritis, Nr. 11, p. 1; Confidential Pro Memoria of Anicetas Simutis, No. 1429/45-B, 14 November 1977 (sent to all members of the LDS). *LCVA*, f. 668, ap. 1, b. 74, l. 96.

<sup>43</sup> Transcript of the letter of Anicetas Simutis to Vytautas Čekanauskas in Los Angeles, No. 1314/45-B, 21 October 1977. *Ibid.*, l. 87.

of the Baltic states<sup>44</sup>. Juzė Daužvardienė, Honorary Consul General, gave a bundle of information letters, photocopies, brochures and other material to Janina Čekanauskienė on her concert tour in Chicago, which were to be handed over to her husband<sup>45</sup>.

On 16 November, Čekanauskas reported to Simutis on the phone that he had accomplished everything he was told to do and solved the question of the consulate's address:

Consulate General of Lithuania  
3959 Franklin Avenue  
Los Angeles, Ca. 90027

Meanwhile, the consul's residence was out of town: Hon. Vytautas Čekanauskas  
Consul General of Lithuania  
3236 N. Sawtooth Court

In the evenings the consul was available on the phone<sup>46</sup>.

The Lithuanian American press also recorded the first steps of the new consul. On 20 November, he participated in the commemoration of the army of independent Lithuania held at the hall of St. Casimir Parish, which was organized by the Lithuanian Riflemen's Union, the Union of the Servicemen Families' Women Birutietės and the Lithuanian Veterans Association Ramovė. Honorary Consul General Čekanauskas was invited by the chairman of the local Juozas Daumantas Riflemen Company, Kazys Karuža, to give the Riflemen's Star to lawyer and journalist Stasys Paltus for his merits in the public sphere and the riflemen's activities and medals to the following riflemen: Uksas, Orlovienė and Janušauskas<sup>47</sup>.

The committee which organized itself in the name of Los Angeles Lithuanians decided to hold a solemn presentation of the new Honorary Consul General Čekanauskas to society at the hall of St. Casimir Parish on 11 December 1977<sup>48</sup>. Diplomats Dr. S. A. Bačkis, Simutis, Daužvardienė, Chairman of the Supreme Committee for the Liberation of Lithuania, Dr. Kęstutis J. Valiūnas, Chairman of the Lithuanian American Council, Dr. Kazys Bobelis and Chairman of the Lithuanian American Community Algimantas Gečys. Alfonsas Tumas, Chairman of the Organizing Committee, promised to cover travel costs for Lithuanian diplomats. The LDS was represented by Simutis; Bobelis was also present at the event, whereas Činga congratulated Čekanauskas on behalf of Gečys. Ernst Lauer, Estonian Honorary Consul, and his wife, the chairman of the Latvian Community, the

<sup>44</sup> Transcript of the letter of S. A. Bačkis to Vytautas Čekanauskas in Los Angeles No. 1598, 22 October 1977. *Ibid.*, l. 92; Transcript of the letter of S. A. Bačkis to Vytautas Čekanauskas in Los Angeles, 8 November 1977. *Ibid.*, l. 93.

<sup>45</sup> Pro Memoria of Juzė Daužvardienė from Chicago "My assistance to the new Consul General Vytautas Čekanauskas", 21 November 1977. *LCVA*, f. 656, ap. 2, b. 123, l. 230.

<sup>46</sup> Pro Memoria of Anicetas Simutis, No. 1440/45-B, 16 November 1977 (sent to all members of the LDS). *LCVA*, f. 668, ap. 1, b. 74, l. 97.

<sup>47</sup> Naujojo Lietuvos garbės konsulo Los Angeles, Cal. pirmieji darbai. *Vienybė*, 1977, lapkričio 25.

<sup>48</sup> Letter of Chairman of the Organizing Committee Alfonsas Tumas to S. A. Bačkis in Washington, 25 November 1977. *LCVA*, f. 668, ap. 1, b. 74, l. 99.

chairman of the Captive Nations Committee and the representatives of several U.S. organizations attended the event. He was congratulated by the representatives of around 25 organizations. The event organizers were surprised – the seats in the parish hall were fully occupied, and there were about a hundred of those who left outside, behind the door of the hall<sup>49</sup>.

Anicetas Simutis noted in the welcoming address that the financial reserves of the LDS had nearly exhausted, and the newly recognized Lithuanian Honorary Consul General could not expect any support for office expenditures. Thus, according to him, “by accepting the honourable post the new consul general puts a heavy financial burden on his shoulders... Therefore, it would be good if the Los Angeles Lithuanian community would be prepared to support the efforts of the consul general in representing Lithuania and its interests on the broadest possible scale if necessary”<sup>50</sup>. These words of the Lithuanian Consul General were taken with due regard. Prelate Kučingis declared that funds would be raised at the church for that matter if required. Bobelis also promised his support. One of the well-wishers gave a 100 dollar cheque, whereas a person congratulating the consul on behalf of Los Angeles *Neo Lituanai* gave a cheque of 1,000 dollars. A new typewriter with Lithuanian characters was donated in the name of one organization. Besides, Čekauskas mentioned that there was a Lithuanian who, having heard about his recognition, sent his first donation – a 100 dollar cheque for office expenses<sup>51</sup>. Therefore, at the start of the consulate’s activities in Los Angeles current expenditures were covered.

## Conclusions

The United States of America, which refused to recognize the annexation of the Baltic states and which was the main enemy of the communist USSR, was very important for the operation of the *Lithuanian Diplomatic Service* (hereinafter – LDS). The USA was home to the largest, most active and well-organized part of the Lithuanian diaspora. After 1940, the LDS and Lithuanian émigrés made efforts to preserve Lithuanian representations – legations, career and honorary consuls – as the hubs of Lithuanian independence and as the hope of statehood in the Lithuanian émigré community for as long as possible. First of all, it was tightly linked with the funding of the representations and staff “rejuvenation” – the attempt to involve Lithuanian émigrés in the LDS. However, that depended on the position of the U.S. Department of State and the officers of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of other countries – to recognize or not the candidate proposed to the relevant

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<sup>49</sup> Confidential Pro Memoria of Anicetas Simutis to the members of the LDS No. 1686/45-B, 15 December 1977. Ibid., l. 100.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., l. 101–102.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., l. 102.

post of the LDS in America or another country where Lithuanian representations were still functioning. A U.S. citizen could also become an honorary consul.

The Lithuanian Honorary Consulate General had functioned on the western coast of the U.S., in California, the city of Los Angeles, which was home to a large Lithuanian community, since 1939. However, after the first consul, Julius J. Bielskis, passed away in 1976, the issue of the consulate's continuity came to the fore. The necessity of the further existence of the consulate was not only discussed by the members of the LDS and the leaders of the Lithuanian émigré community but also by Estonians and Latvians in Los Angeles, whose population, even taken together, was considerably less numerous than that of Lithuanians. Despite that, Estonians and Latvians had their honorary consuls in Los Angeles.

The correspondence among Chief of the LDS Stasys Lozoraitis, Lithuanian representative in Washington, Dr. Stasys A. Bačkis, and Lithuanian Consul General in New York Anicetas Simutis reveals that a sufficiently young candidate, fluent in English and Lithuanian, nurturing Lithuanian traditions and the mother tongue in the family, active in Lithuanian American organizations and having confidence in the Lithuanian society as well as known in the American environment, financially well-off and capable of exercising the consul's responsibilities at its own cost could apply for the position of the Honorary Consul General. However, he had to be not involved in any movement or political activities of the Lithuanian émigré community. The candidacy of Vytautas Čekanauskas (1929–2009) came to the foreground from among a number of other candidates to the consul's position in Los Angeles and its environs, which was also supported by the majority of Lithuanian organizations.

After Lithuanian diplomats failed to find out what Los Angeles Lithuanians wished to see in the Honorary Consul General's post in a discrete manner, the question had to be resolved openly. Lithuanian organizations and individual persons in Los Angeles started proposing their candidates, which often involved humiliation of other candidates and growing escalation. It prolonged and burdened the choice of the candidate. It was only after four months of observation and information collection, on 7 April, that Stasys Lozoraitis, Chief of the LDS, decided on the candidacy of Vytautas Čekanauskas. On 26 August, he informed Dr. S. A. Bačkis that Vytautas Čekanauskas was appointed Lithuanian Honorary Consul General in Los Angeles. After various considerations, on 6 October, the U.S. Department of State recognized Čekanauskas' appointment by awarding the required documents to him. The new consul had to withdraw from all Lithuanian organizations.

The Lithuanian American press informed the Lithuanian émigré community on the new Honorary Consul General on a broad scale. Čekanauskas de facto commenced his service as the consul on 20 November by presenting Riflemen's Stars and medals to noteworthy Los Angeles Lithuanians and giving a festive address. On 11 December 1977, Los Angeles Lithuanians held a solemn event in honour of Čekanauskas at the hall of

St. Casimir Parish. The high level of participation and donations for the initial consular work showed that the consul's personality was acceptable for the majority of Lithuanian émigrés and they would provide financial support for the consul's activities if required.

Čekanauskas served in the consul's position until his death in 2009. He lived to see the day when the independent state of Lithuania was restored and served for it.

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# Vytauto Čekausko paskyrimo Lietuvos garbės generaliniu konsulu Los Andžele 1977 m. užkulisiai

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## Santrauka

1940–1990 m. veikusiai *Lietuvos diplomatinei tarnybai* (toliau – LDT) labai svarbi valstybė buvo JAV, pagrindinė komunistinės TSRS priešė, kurios valdžia nepripažino Baltijos šalių aneksijos. Pokariu JAV gyveno didžiausia, aktyviausia ir gerai organizuota lietuvių išeivių dalis. LDT ir lietuvių išeivija po 1940 m. dėjo pastangas kuo ilgiau išsaugoti Lietuvos atstovybes–pasiuntinybes, karjeros ir garbės konsulatų, kaip Lietuvos nepriklausomybės „žiburėlius“, kaip valstybingumo viltį tarp išeivijos lietuvių. Pirmiausia tai buvo glaudžiai susieta su atstovybių finansavimu ir personalo „atjauninimu“, t. y. siekiu į LDT gretas įtraukti lietuvių išeivijos atstovus. Bet visa tai priklausė nuo JAV valstybės departamento ir kitų šalių užsienio reikalų ministerijų valdininkų pozicijos – pripažinti ar nepripažinti siūlomą kandidatą į atitinkamą LDT postą Amerikoje ar kitoje šalyje, kur funkcionavo išlikusios Lietuvos atstovybės. Garbės konsulu galėjo tapti ir JAV pilietis.

JAV vakarų pakrantėje – Kalifornijoje, kur gyveno gausi lietuvių bendruomenė, Los Andželo mieste nuo 1939 m. veikė Lietuvos garbės generalinis konsulatas. Bet 1976 m. mirus pirmajam konsului Juliu J. Bielskiui, iškilo konsulato tęstinumo klausimas. Apie konsulato veiklos tolimesnio gyvavimo būtinumą kalbėjo ne tik LDT nariai ir išeivijos vadovai, bet ir Los Andželo estai bei latviai, kurių net kartu sudėjus buvo gerokai mažiau nei lietuvių tame krašte. Nepaisant to, estai ir latviai turėjo savo garbės konsulus Los Andžele.

Iš LDT šefo Stasio Lozoraičio, Lietuvos atstovo Vašingtone dr. Stasio A. Bačkio ir Lietuvos generalinio konsulo Niujorke Aniceto Simučio susirašinėjimo matyti, kad į garbės generalinio konsulo vietą galėjo pretenduoti gana jaunas, laisvai anglų ir lietuvių kalbomis bendraujantis, šeimoje lietuviškas tradicijas ir kalbą palaikantis, veiklus JAV lietuvių organizacijose ir turintis pasitikėjimą lietuvių visuomenėje bei žinomas amerikiečių aplinkoje, finansiškai pakankamai apsirūpinęs ir galintis savo lėšomis vykdyti konsulo pareigas kandidatas, bet neįsipainiojęs į išeivijos politinę veiklą. Tarp daugelio pretendentų užimti konsulo vietą Los Andžele ir jo apylinkėse 1977 m. ryškėjo inžinieriaus Vytauto Čekausko (1929–2009) kandidatūra, kurią rėmė dauguma lietuvių organizacijų.

Lietuvos diplomatams nepavykus diskretiškai išsiaiškinti, ką Los Andželo lietuviai norėtų matyti garbės generalinio konsulo poste, teko tą klausimą spręsti atvirai. Los Andželo lietuvių organizacijos ir pavieniai asmenys pradėjo siūlyti savo kandidatus, neretai juodindami kitus,

gilindami susipriešinimą. Tai užtęsė ir apsunkino kandidato pasirinkimą. Ir tik po keturių mėnesių stebėjimo ir informacijos rinkimo LDT šefas S. Lozoraitis balandžio 7 d. apsistojo prie V. Čekanausko kandidatūros. Rugpjūčio 26 d. jis pranešė dr. S. A. Bačkiui, kad V.Čekanauskas yra paskirtas Lietuvos garbės generaliniu konsulu Los Andžele. Po įvairių svarstymų, spalio 6 d., JAV valstybės departamentas pripažino V. Čekanausko paskyrimą ir įteikė jam reikalingus dokumentus. Naujasis konsulas privalėjo išeiti iš visų lietuviškų organizacijų.

JAV lietuvių spauda plačiai informavo išeiviją apie naująjį garbės generalinį konsulą. Savo pareigas V. Čekanauskas praktiškai pradėjo eiti nuo lapkričio 20 d., įteikdamas pasižymėjusiems Los Andželo lietuviams Šaulių žvaigždės ordiną ir medalius, pasakydamas šventinę kalbą. Los Andželo lietuviai 1977 m. gruodžio 11 d. iškilmingai pagerbė V. Čekanauską Šv. Kazimiero parapijos salėje. Gausus žmonių dalyvavimas ir aukos pradiniam konsuliniam darbui rodė, kad konsulo asmenybė yra priimtina daugeliui lietuvių išeivių ir iš jų bus sulaukta, jei to prisireiks, finansinės paramos konsulo veiklai paremti. V. Čekanauskas konsulo pareigas ėjo iki savo mirties 2009 m. – sulaukė Lietuvos nepriklausomybės.

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