

Taiwan's turn to help Lithuania

Written by Chang Jim-way 陳其偉

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Lithuania, which has never received overseas aid from Taiwan, has done so much for the nation this year.

Not only did it donate much-needed COVID-19 vaccines last month — at about the same time that seasonal rains finally brought an end to Taiwan's crippling water shortage — but it has demonstrated resolve in developing relations with Taipei even in the face of pressure from Beijing.

Taiwan and Lithuania are joined in standing up for what is right, but how can Taiwan return the favor?

For many years now, Lithuania has suffered from a social issue that could even be regarded as existential. That is, its suicide rate is one of the highest in the world, and certainly the highest in the EU. It is higher even than in South Korea, with the massive social pressure that exists in that country.

One of the main reasons for Lithuania's high suicide rate is its geographical position, in the high latitudes of the northern hemisphere, which means that it sees very little sunlight for long periods, leading to seasonal affective disorder among its population.

Once again, the power of nature over human society is displayed.

This is precisely where Taiwan can help. Taiwan is a sub-tropical island, and has sunshine throughout the year. After the COVID-19 pandemic abates, a tourism sector should be developed specifically for Lithuanians to visit Taiwan during winter months.

In the meantime, a range of Taiwanese products, resplendent and full of tropical atmosphere, should be sent to Lithuania. For example, boxes of pineapple cakes with pictures of sun and sand on the packaging.

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The power of gift-giving should not be underestimated.

According to research by Yale University social psychologist John Bargh, people have the ability to extrapolate abstract concepts from material things. For example, if you hand a hot cup of coffee to a person you are talking to, that person is more likely to regard you as a “warm” person than if you had handed them a cup of iced coffee; if you invite a guest to sit on a comfortable sofa, they are more likely to consider you a “gentle” person than if you had asked them to sit on a hard bench.

Taiwanese should therefore make hay while the sun shines, and prepare all kinds of products that can be associated with the sun and the tropics before winter arrives in the northern hemisphere, and send them to their Lithuanian brothers and sisters to help them get through the long year.

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Translated by Paul Cooper

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