THE HISTORY OF LITHUANIA

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Revised Second Edition

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Publishing House
"Eugrimas"
2015

Published on behalf of the Ministry of
Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Lithuania

Translated from the second Lithuanian edition (2013)
Revised English translation by
Skirma Kondratas and Ramūnas Kondratas

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ISBN 978-609-437-163-9

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ABBREVIATIONS

CDPL	Christian Democratic Party of Lithuania
CPL	Communist Party of Lithuania
CPSU	Communist Party of the Soviet Union
DLPL	Democratic Labour Party of Lithuania
EU	European Union
GDL	Grand Duchy of Lithuania
GRRCL	Genocide and Resistance Research Centre of Lithuania
HU-LC	Homeland Union - Lithuanian Conservatives
KGB	Committee for State Security (USSR, from 1954; successor to NKGB and MGB)
LAF	Lithuanian Activists' Front
LCSA	Lithuanian Central State Archive
LDS	Lithuanian Diplomatic Service
LFA	Lithuanian Freedom Army
LLL	Lithuanian Liberty League
LRMS	Lithuanian Reform Movement *Sąjūdis*
LSSR	Lithuanian Soviet Socialist Republic
MGB	Ministry for State Security (USSR)
MVD	Ministry of Internal Affairs (USSR)
NKGB	People's Commissariat for State Security (USSR; in 1941 and 1943–1946; renamed MGB)
NKVD	People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs (USSR)
PLC	Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth
SC-RS	Supreme Council – Restoration Seimas
SCLL	Supreme Committee for the Liberation of Lithuania
SDPL	Social Democratic Party of Lithuania
ULFF	Union of Lithuanian Freedom Fighters
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics

FOREWORD

Every country's history is unique and interesting. Its main narratives, themes, interpretations and points of emphasis change somewhat over time with changing geopolitical and sociocultural conditions and trends in historical analysis. This is also true of Lithuania's history, which is complicated by the fact that twice in its thousand-year history it ceased to exist as a state and disappeared from world maps and popular consciousness: from 1795–1915, when it was part of the Russian Empire, and then when it was annexed by the Soviet Union during World War II. The restoration in 1990 of Lithuania's independence and status as a free nation which chose to orient itself toward the West and Western ideals of democracy has given a fresh impetus to historians and scholars in Lithuania and abroad to look anew at this country's heroic and brave as well as tragic and sad history.

This volume is a welcome addition to existing histories in the English language because it covers Lithuania's entire history from its beginnings through 2004 in a concise and easy-to-read format, with many maps and illustrations which bring the words to life. The scholarship reflects the most recent research and interpretations of past events in Lithuania, and brings to light new facts that allow dispassionate and objective evaluation of some aspects of Lithuanian history that have been neglected or ignored in the past, weaving the whole into a narrative that places events in the European cultural and political context.

In preparing this revised English edition, we had the English-speaking audience foremost in mind. Thus we abridged certain sections and added others. When historical context, perhaps familiar to Lithuanians, seemed insufficiently explained for a non-Lithuanian general reader, new text and explanations were added. Facts, especially dates and statistics, were carefully rechecked. We cannot claim infallibility and so careful readers may find mistakes we have overlooked. We found that sometimes different sources provide different numbers and different interpretations, so judgment calls were made in deciding on the final text. Each revised chapter was sent to the authors for approval. The original translation was considerably revised and two new photographs were added.

We also prepared a completely new list of suggested further readings, all in English, trusting that such a list will prove useful to readers interested in more detailed information on specific aspects of Lithuanian history.

We are very grateful to Alfonsas Eidintas, the editor and one of the authors of the Lithuanian edition, for his useful comments and suggestions and patience with us, and for acting as an intermediary with the other authors for this new English edition. We also wish to thank Gintė Damušis, Director of the Department of Lithuanians Living Abroad at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and Giedrius Puodžiūnas of the Public Affairs Department for facilitating our efforts. We would also like to acknowledge Algimantas Gureckas, whose insights and comments we found useful.

SKIRMA and RAMŪNAS KONDRATAS
Vilnius, 2015

PREFACE

This small volume attempts to describe how Lithuania came into being as a nation and a state through the efforts and struggles of its leaders and peoples, through their never-ending yearning to be free, to protect their way of life and identity, and to be the masters of their fate. The fact that Lithuania is once again free and independent is testimony to those who through the ages made great sacrifices to ensure its existence and well-being.

The book will acquaint the reader with the historic ordeals of our people and provide a sense of the often turbulent times through which the Lithuanians persevered. A nation's future is contingent upon its memory, a sentiment reflected in the words of the Lithuanian educator Mikalojus Akelaitis in a letter to the Polish writer and historian Józef Ignacy Kraszewski in 1859: "A nation's history must be on every citizen's lips, and then the nation will be immortal." It was precisely this view that inspired leaders of the national revival (Simonas Daukantas and Jonas Mačiulis-Maironis, among others) to record for posterity their country's past in writing.

General histories are written to synthesize the body of a country's historical knowledge in order to educate a country's citizens at significant junctures during its development, or to mark significant events. Sometimes they are initiated by state institutions that recognize their duty to promote civic-mindedness and a shared national identity. In 1936, on the initiative and under the auspices of the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Lithuania (specifically, Vice-minister Kazimieras Masiliūnas), a group of Lithuanian historians wrote and published a comprehensive history of Lithuania that was edited by Adolfas Šapoka. In Lithuania, this is perhaps the best-known national history of the Lithuanian state and nation – one that has influenced generations past and present. Written during turbulent times, the goal of the publication was to inspire the Lithuanian people to take pride in the thousand-year history of Lithuania, to acquaint them with the conquests and deeds of heroes of old; with authentic Baltic culture; with an appreciation of Lithuanian, the most

archaic living Indo-European language; and with the activities of emigrants around the world.

In preparation for the 1939 New York World's Fair, under Minister Stasys Lozoraitis, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Lithuania initiated and prepared a special Lithuanian exhibition for the fair. The exhibition took shape under the direction of Magdalena Avietėnaitė and featured Lithuanian art and folk art, showcased the nation's economic achievements, and presented Lithuania's most significant historical events on monumental canvases created by renowned Lithuanian artists. Our intellectuals, academics, and artists were thus encouraged to rally in presenting a comprehensive overview of Lithuania and its history to the world.

An opportunity to continue the tradition of such commendable governmental and diplomatic initiatives arose in 2013. After restoring its independence on 11 March 1990 and becoming a fully fledged member of the family of democratic states that constitute the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the European Union (EU) in 2004, in 2013 Lithuania took on the historic responsibility of chairing the Presidency of the Council of the EU. This was not only a unique opportunity to contribute to the creation of a common European future, it was also a chance to strengthen international solidarity and promote a better understanding of each other's cultures and histories. And, of course, for us it was a chance to once again attempt a synthesis of Lithuanian history from a current perspective and the benefit of much new research to remind the world what Lithuania was and is.

In preparing for the Lithuanian Presidency, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs under Minister Audronius Ažubalis turned to scholars at Vilnius University's Institute of International Relations and Political Science to compile a concise, easy-to-read, objective history of the nation. With many years of experience in the field of political history, Professors Raimundas Lopata (chair), Alvydas Jokubaitis, Vytautas Radžvilas, and Dr. Inga Vinogradnaitė constituted the editorial board. The purpose of the book was to acquaint the general reader, in particular the citizens of the EU, with the broad sweep of Lithuanian history from the time it was first mentioned in a European chronicle in 1009 until its metamorphosis into a fully fledged member of the EU in 2004.

Coordinating the compilation of the book and editing it was entrusted to the writer of these lines. Well-known Lithuanian historians were invited to be authors: the development of the ancient Lithuanian state and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania is analyzed by Alfredas Bumblauskas of Vilnius University (Chapters I and II, as well as the Introduction); Antanas Kulakauskas of Vytautas Magnus University wrote about the life of Lithuanians in the Russian Empire from 1795

to 1915 (Chapter III); the restoration of the modern Lithuanian state and the two decades of its independence from 1918 to 1940 were examined by Alfonsas Eidintas (Chapter IV); and Mindaugas Tamošaitis, a lecturer at the Lithuanian University of Educational Sciences, summarized the events from the occupations of 1940 until 2004 (Chapters V and VI). The editor was faced with the daunting task of creating a cohesive story from four different narrative styles, of planning the scale of the chapters, and of providing links and transitions so that the narrative would be smooth, balanced, and not overburdened with inessential facts, while appearing as pleasant to the eye of the reader as possible. Because a book for the general reader is necessarily constrained in length, covering a thousand years of history in approximately 300 pages necessitated an abbreviated overview of many economic, social and cultural developments. The editor thus hopes for the understanding of readers who may not find particular topics of interest covered in sufficient detail. This is the first attempt since the restoration of the state in 1990 to present to the general reader at home and abroad the entire span of the history of Lithuania.

On behalf of all the authors, I would like to express my heartfelt thanks to the people who initiated this publication and to the members of the editorial board for reading the initial drafts. Special thanks go to Jaunius Petraitis, as well as to Dr Vytautas Žalys and Romanas Judinas. We are also very grateful to Dr Zenonas Butkus and Dr Saulius Kaubrys for their critiques, as well as to the many others who contributed to the book's compilation, illustration and selection of maps.

ALFONSAS EIDINTAS
Editor of the Lithuanian Edition
Vilnius, 2013

Introduction

LITHUANIA – PART OF CENTRAL EUROPE

Geographical Centre of Europe

If you were to draw lines on a map of Europe to connect Gibraltar with the northern part of the Ural Mountains, Scotland with the Caucasus Mountains, and the southern Greek islands with Norway's north, almost all of them would intersect in Lithuania, where the geographical centre of Europe is located. In 1989, the French National Geographic Institute carried out calculations which determined that the geographical centre of Europe is located at 54°55'N 25°19'E – some 26 km (16 mi) to the north of the Lithuanian capital, Vilnius. The method used for calculating this point was the centre of gravity of the geometrical figure of Europe. Lithuania is situated at the same geographical latitude as southern Sweden, Denmark and Scotland to its west, and at the same geographical longitude as Finland to its north and Romania, Bulgaria and Greece to its south.

Lithuania is at a crossroads between Eastern and Western Europe, between Germany and Russia. In the past, the Germans took this route on their way east, and the Russians on their way west. Though Lithuania is the geographical centre of Europe (and Kaunas was a Hansa city), it is often considered part of Eastern rather than Central Europe. This is due to the country's geopolitical situation more than to its geographical one, for in the 19th and 20th centuries, Lithuania was occupied and annexed by its eastern neighbour more than once.

In terms of civilization, however, Lithuania belongs to Central Europe; it is on the periphery of Western civilization. In Lithuania, as in other Central European countries (Poland, the Czech Republic, Hungary), there were distinct differences from Eastern Europe: the formation, from as far back as the Middle Ages, of individual peasant homesteads rather than village communities or communes; the formation of a civil society of nobles rather than Eastern centralism and despotism; and the predominance of Western culture and Catholicism rather than Orthodoxy. There were attempts to bring Catholics and Orthodox together through

the formation of a new Greek Catholic Church (the "Uniates"), which allows us to speak of Lithuania as a link between Roman Central Europe and Byzantine Eastern Europe.

Origin of the Name of Lithuania

Lithuania's name was first mentioned in written records in 1009, though it is much older than that. The Lithuanian tribe became differentiated from the Eastern Balts several centuries earlier. Linguists have determined that the Lithuanian language became differentiated from Latvian around the 7th century. However, Lithuanian-speaking people did not necessarily call themselves Lithuanians or their land Lithuania.

Until now, the most widely accepted hypothesis is that the name of Lithuania derived from a hydronym – the name of a small river (only 11 km in length) near Kernavė, the Lietauka. According to tradition, in early historical times the core of the Lithuanian state, the land of Lithuania, lay between the Nemunas and Neris Rivers. The Lietauka River, a right tributary of the Neris, flowed towards the land of Lithuania, and was not necessarily in Lithuania itself. Since that is the case, the name of the river more likely derived from that of the land, and not the other way around, raising doubts about this traditional explanation.

Today some scholars postulate that the name of Lithuania derived from the ethnonym Lithuanian, and so have turned their attention to place names outside of Lithuania with the roots *leit-* and *liet-* which were possibly derived from the ethnonym *lietuvis* (Lithuanian). Their hypothesis is that during the reigns of Gediminas and Vytautas , and perhaps as early as Mindaugas, people loyal to the Lithuanian rulers were settled in non-Lithuanian areas – those inhabited by Ruthenians as well as those inhabited by Samogitians. Locals called these settlers *leitis* (pl. *leičiai*), and perhaps *lietis* (pl. *liečiai*) as well. Thus, Lithuania's name may have originated from the ethnonym *lietis* or *leitis*, associated with a military function in conquered territories.

Lithuania's boundaries in 1009 were quite a bit farther east and south than Lithuania's current southeastern border. The territory that Lithuanians inhabited when founding their state, more or less coincident with the boundaries of present-day Lithuania, is called ethnic Lithuania. A part of ethnic Lithuania is beyond the present-day borders of Lithuania;

Vytis (Mounted Knight) coat of arms from the title page of the Laurentius transcription (1531) of the *First Lithuanian Statute*.

on the other hand, the territories of the ancient Samogitians and parts of the territories of the Yotvingians, Selonians, Semigallians and Prussians to the west, all tribes related to the Lithuanians, were eventually subsumed into Lithuania, a natural development. The nucleus of the early Lithuanian state was the territory between the Nemunas and the Neris Rivers, but Mindaugas was quick to incorporate other territories inhabited by Lithuanians and expand his influence in the territories of kindred Baltic tribes. Were it not for the Germanic attacks from the west and Slavic expansion, some hypothesize that the Lithuanian state would have encompassed even more territory, possibly including all of the Baltic tribes within its borders.

Eventually the territory inhabited by people who spoke Lithuanian and later developed an ethnic Lithuanian consciousness narrowed in the east

and south, while the name of Lithuania, on the contrary, extended far to the east together with the borders of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and encompassed the broad lands of the East Slavs. The entire territory of this former state (not just present-day Lithuania, but Belarus and large parts of Ukraine as well) came to be called Lithuania, and Lithuanian historians today refer to it as historical Lithuania.

In the 16th–18th centuries, nobles of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania (GDL), regardless of their ethnic origin, considered themselves Lithuanians. Even the official written language of the state (used to write the *Statutes* of Lithuania and other documents), the Slavic parent language of present-day Ukrainian and Belarusian, was called Lithuanian by Moscow chroniclers because it was distinct from Muscovite Russian and incorporated some Lithuanian terms. The eminent 19th-century Polish poet Adam Mickiewicz became a bard of historic Lithuania, and Nobel laureate Czesław Miłosz considered himself to be "the last citizen" of the GDL. This identification with the GDL characterizes the so-called "Old Lithuanians" (*senalietuviai*). At the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, however, they began to face opposition from the "Young Lithuanians" (*jaunalietuviai*), for whom language and ethnic identity were paramount, and who created the Republic of Lithuania just a short time later.

Lithuania's name became an identity for Jews as well. During the entire period of historical Lithuania (GDL), the Jews that lived there called the country Lita, and themselves – Litvaks. Thus the name of Lithuania was spread by the old Lithuanian state, the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. Once the Polish-Lithuanian state was partitioned in 1795, the lands of the GDL became part of the Russian Empire. Until the 1831 uprising against the tsarist regime, the name of Lithuania still existed in administrative designations, after which it was banned.

Lithuania's name spread in another direction as well. In the 15th century, the lands that had been turned into wilderness during the campaigns of the Teutonic Knights, that had once belonged to the Baltic tribes of Yotvingians, Skalvians and Nadruvians, began to be resettled by the returning descendants of these tribes, and even more by Lithuanians. They settled in the wilderness not only on the Lithuanian side of the border, but on the other side as well. (When a border was established between Lithuania and the Teutonic Order in 1422, only a part of the old Yotvingian territory reverted to Lithuania). In time, Lithuanians living in the state es-

tablished by the Teutonic Order, later renamed the Duchy of Prussia and even later – the Kingdom of Prussia, started to be called *lietuvininkai* (a different form of the word for Lithuanian) and their land – Prussian Lithuania or Lithuania Minor. Later, probably in the 19th century, Lithuania proper began to be called Lithuania Major.

A paradox – Lithuania Minor was part of a foreign state, yet it was there that the Lithuanian written language first developed. It was there that the first significant piece of literature written in the Lithuanian language was created – Kristijonas Donelaitis's *The Seasons* (ca 1765–1775). Though Lithuania's name was officially used in Prussia in the 18th century – a Lithuanian Department was established with its centre in Gumbinnen (Gusev) – the use of the Lithuanian language in Prussia eventually declined due to Germanization and Lithuanian assimilation. After World War II, the old population of Prussia was killed or displaced by the Russians, and only a few Lithuanian speakers remained. Lithuania's name disappeared in that territory as well.

The history of Lithuania Major was quite different. Upon destruction of the old Lithuanian state by Russia, the name of Lithuania fell out of official use after the suppression of the 1831 uprising – it was replaced by the term Northwestern Territory. Lithuania's name gained new meanings. Alongside the historical concept of Lithuania (the former GDL), a modern linguistic concept, which linked the name of Lithuania with the use of the Lithuanian language, gained more and more strength. This latter concept was used as a basis by the creators of the new Lithuanian state – the Republic of Lithuania – who aspired to incorporate Lithuania Minor into Lithuania, but who relinquished claims to historical Lithuanian lands where the Lithuanian language had never been spoken.

The concept of a modern Lithuania based on language faced a huge problem. In the beginning of the 20th century, in the southeastern part of ethnic Lithuania (the Vilnius region), the Lithuanian language was abandoned in favour of Polish and Belarusian (or what the local population called the language of the *tutejszy*, or locals). To be sure, in that part of Lithuania, as it lost its ethnic identity, some nobles still called themselves "Litvins" or "Old Lithuanians" (*senalietuviai)*, but the majority increasingly identified with Poland and considered Lithuania to be a part of Poland.

It was precisely this concept of a Lithuanian state based on language that emerged as a point of contention during the Polish-Lithuanian con-

flict over Vilnius in 1920, when the "Republic of Central Lithuania" was formed in the Vilnius region by the occupying Polish authorities. Based on such a Polish conception of Lithuania, the Republic of Lithuania was called "Kaunas Lithuania", and the Samogitian dialect – the Lithuanian language. The meaning of "Central Lithuania" can only be understood by bearing in mind that the old Ruthenian GDL lands to the east were called "Minsk" or "Ruthenian" Lithuania. This tripartite conception of Lithuania, which was employed ostensibly to restore the tradition of the GDL, was just a declaration, no longer in keeping with historical reality, but it was, in fact, the Polish conception of Lithuania.

In the 1922 elections to the Vilnius Sejm that took place by Polish decree in the Lithuanian territory occupied by General Lucjan Żeligowski, the so-called "Republic of Central Lithuania", the vote was overwhelmingly in favour of the annexationists. The Vilnius region was to become a part of Poland. But the Military Commission of the League of Nations that observed these elections reported "serious doubts" about the outcome given the fact that the Lithuanians, the Jews and a large part of the Belarusians officially abstained from taking part in the elections, that the elections were carried out under military occupation, and that the Polish authorities had at their disposal all governmental means of pressure. The Commission concluded that the election results could not be considered "a true and sincere expression" of the entirety of the population in the territory.

For their part, the Lithuanians were determined to create the state of Lithuania based on ethnic grounds and no longer laid claim to "Minsk Lithuania". However, they could not imagine their state without its historical capital Vilnius. Furthermore, the creators of the modern state of Lithuania had pretensions to the lands of Lithuania Minor. Only part of Lithuania Minor, the Klaipėda region, was separated from Germany at the Versailles Peace Conference (1919), but it was not ceded to Lithuania, becoming instead a protectorate of the Entente Powers, administered by France. Incidentally, not all of the Klaipėda Lithuanians (*lietuvininkai*) wanted to join Lithuania – some sought "free city" status similar to that of Danzig (present-day Gdansk).

GDL coat of arms: the Vytis (Mounted Knight) from the mid-16th century heraldic book *Stemmata Polonica* by Jan Długosz (held at the Library of the Arsenal in Paris).

General Outline of the History of Lithuania

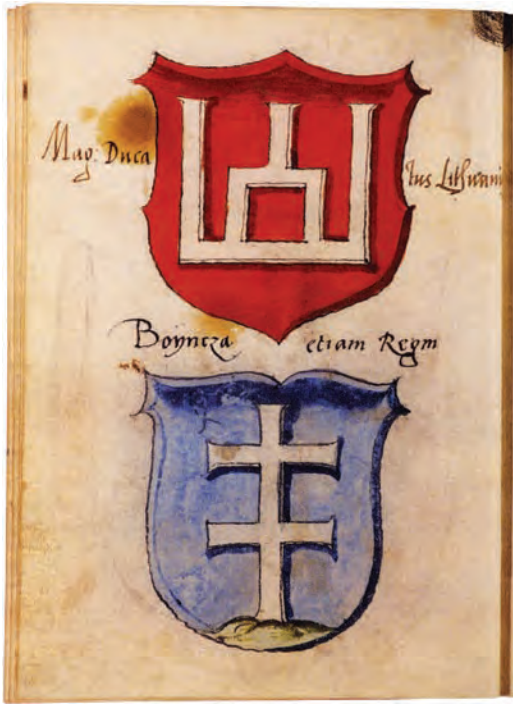
Archaeological evidence indicates that the Baltic culture emerged amid the prehistoric cultures of the Eastern European forest land around 3,000–2,000 BC. It became known to Roman and other cultures from the 1st century AD. It is generally thought that cultural attributes such as the Lithuanian language and folklore, as well as the Lithuanian pagan religion, developed during these prehistoric times, though the full development of the religion is now dated to the years of the formation of the state.

The state – the Grand Duchy of Lithuania – was created in the middle of the 13th century. Its first ruler, Mindaugas, was not only baptized into the Roman Catholic faith, but was also crowned king in 1253. Though his reign was but a short historical episode, the pagan state he helped create gradually became a regional power or empire that conquered vast expanses of the Orthodox lands that had formerly been part of Kievan Rus'. In 1387, Lithuania adopted Roman Catholicism and when Samogitia, one of its ethnic regions, became the last region in Europe to become Christianized in 1413, the formation of Christian Europe was complete.

The aggressiveness of the Teutonic Order on its western borders prompted the Grand Duchy of Lithuania to gradually strengthen its ties with Poland and, in the course of the 15th–16th centuries, Lithuania was increasingly influenced by Western Christian culture. In the mid-16th century, a union was formed with the Kingdom of Poland and a dual state, the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, was established. This state contributed much to European and global civilization in the 17th–18th centuries. These contributions can briefly be encapsulated by these key words: bread, tolerance, democracy, constitution, and baroque.

The Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth:

- supplied the West with grain (via Gdansk to Amsterdam),
- created a tradition of religious tolerance and nobiliary democracy that was virtually unheard of at the time,



The Columns of the Gediminids and the Cross of Jogaila (GDL coats of arms) from the mid-16th century heraldic book *Stemmata Polonica* by Jan Długosz (held at the Library of the Arsenal in Paris).

- in the 16th–18th centuries, Vilnius became the sole European capital standing on the frontier between two worlds, a place where ten religious denominations lived in accord; to the Jewish world, it was known as the city of the Vilna Gaon and the "Jerusalem of the North",
- fostered the widely renowned Vilnius University, one of the oldest in Central Europe, with its distinctive traditions of missionaries, martyrs and saints, poets, rhetoricians and logicians,
- nurtured the Vilnius school of baroque architecture, which was significant on a European scale,
- created a legal tradition that in the 16th century produced the most systematic legal code in Europe, the *Lithuanian Statutes*, and, in 1791, a constitution that was the earliest written constitution in Europe.

The easternmost example (500 km east of Vilnius) of the Vilnius school of baroque architecture – Glaubitz's Discalced Carmelite Church in Mstsislaw. Photograph by Alfredas Bumblauskas.

The Commonwealth was dismembered by Russia, Austria and Prussia in three partitions in the last quarter of the 18th century. Lithuania proper was annexed by Russia. Yet even under the difficult conditions which ensued, a romantic literary tradition, whose great representatives were Adam Mickiewicz and Juliusz Słowacki, emerged and flourished, and Vilnius University retained its renown. The cultural traditions of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth never became part of the culture of the Russian Empire. On the contrary, since the dominant language in the Commonwealth when it was partitioned was Polish, and the poets Mickiewicz and Słowacki wrote in Polish, they galvanized patriotic and anti-Russian sentiment among both Poles and Lithuanians and their works became an important part of Polish culture. In the early 19th century, Vilnius was considered the capital of Polish culture outside the boundaries of ethnic Poland.

After the partition of the Commonwealth in 1795, Lithuania remained under Russian rule until it declared its independence in 1918 and subse-

One of Lithuanian artist Mikalojus Konstantinas Čiurlionis's best-known paintings – *Kings' Tale*, 1909.

quently created a state – the Republic of Lithuania – based on new democratic and national principles. Among the major figures in the National Revival leading up to independence were the great Lithuanian artist, painter and composer Mikalojus Konstantinas Čiurlionis, the National Revival bard and poet Maironis, and Jonas Basanavičius, who came to be called the nation's patriarch. They were followed by a whole plethora of modern artists, writers and architects who over the course of two decades managed to change the face and landscape of Lithuania.

Today, tongue-in-cheek, young historians list the achievements of the first Republic of Lithuania in brief: butter, ANBO aeroplanes, and basketball. What they have in mind are the agricultural progress that independent Lithuania made, its technological progress, symbolized by the design and manufacture of aeroplanes in Kaunas, and the two European championship titles won by the Lithuanian men's basketball team in 1937

and 1939. These achievements and sources of pride were erased by the Soviet Union, which first occupied Lithuania in 1940 and then again in 1944. Even though Lithuania suffered great losses as a result of the Lithuanian Holocaust, the mass deportations to Siberia carried out by the Soviet Union, and the 1944 emigration to the West, it still managed to rise up and wage a guerrilla war against Soviet rule (the "war after the war," from 1945–1953). This is sometimes considered to be Lithuania's most significant contribution to the course of European history in the 20th century. But today there are also other candidates for this distinction: the organizers of the Lithuanian Reform Movement *Sąjūdis* (1988–1990) and the Baltic Way (1989), the signers of the Lithuanian Declaration of Independence of March 11, 1990, and the heroes of the January Events (1991). They all helped to restore Lithuania's independence after a half-century of Soviet occupation and contributed to the downfall of the Soviet Union.

It is also important to note that Lithuania became a member of the European Union (EU) and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) in 2004.

Milestones in the History of Lithuania

97 AD	First account of the Aesti (Balts) by the Roman historian Tacitus in his treatise *Germania*.
1009	St. Bruno's mission to Lithuania – baptism of Lithuania's ruler 'King Netimer'; the written account of Bruno's mission in the *Annals of Quedlinburg* contains the first known historical mention of Lithuania (*Litua*).
1236	Battle of Saulė in which the pagan Samogitians defeated the Livonian Brothers of the Sword.
1253	Mindaugas crowned king of the newly formed Lithuanian state.
1260	Battle of Durbė in which the pagan Samogitians defeated the joint army of the Teutonic Knights and the Livonian Order.
1316–1341	Reign of Gediminas, after whom the Gediminid dynasty is named.
1323	Gediminas moves the capital of Lithuania from Trakai to Vilnius.
1385	Act of Krėva; Grand Duke of Lithuania Jogaila becomes King of Poland; beginning of Lithuania and Poland's shared history.
1387	Christianization of Lithuania.
1392–1430	Reign of Vytautas, Lithuania's most famous ruler.
1410	Battle of Grunwald; the united army of Poland and Lithuania decisively defeats the Teutonic Order, which posed a threat to the existence of both states.

1514	Lithuanian and Polish armies defeat the Muscovite army in a battle near Orsha; part of the fourth Muscovite-Lithuanian War (1512–1522).
1569	Union of Lublin; creation of a united Polish-Lithuanian state – the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth.
1795	Last partition of the Polish-Lithuanian state by Russia, Austria and Prussia; most of Lithuania becomes part of the Russian Empire.
1830	November Uprising against Russian rule.
1863	January Uprising against Russian rule.
1918	On February 16, while under German occupation, the Council of Lithuania, chaired by Jonas Basanavičius, proclaims the restoration of an independent state of Lithuania.
1920	Soviet-Lithuanian Peace treaty signed; the Vilnius region seized by Polish General Želigowski.
1940	On June 15, in compliance with the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, the Soviet Union occupies Lithuania, a puppet government is formed (June 17) and the Soviet Union annexes Lithuania (August 3); Soviet terror and deportations begin.
1941–1944	Occupation by Nazi Germany and the Holocaust in Lithuania.
1944–1953	Period of Soviet-organized repressions, deportations, mass collectivization and Lithuanian armed resistance.
1976	Helsinki Group is formed.
1988	On June 3, the Lithuanian Reform Movement *Sąjūdis* is founded.
1990	On March 11, the Supreme Council of the Lithuanian SSR declares the re-establishment of Lithuanian independence and becomes the Supreme Council of the Republic of Lithuania.
1993	Lithuanian currency, the litas, introduced; Russia completes troop withdrawal from Lithuania.
2004	Lithuania becomes a member of the EU and NATO.

Chapter I

THE GRAND DUCHY OF LITHUANIA

ANCIENT BALTS AND EMERGENCE OF THE LITHUANIAN STATE

The Balts are usually described as an ethno-linguistic group of people who live or lived on the Baltic Sea's eastern coast and speak or spoke Baltic languages that form a separate branch of the Indo-European language family. Today, this branch is represented only by the living Lithuanian and Latvian languages. The Balts and their Lithuanian and Latvian descendants have led a settled life by the Baltic Sea for at least four thousand years. As a result, they are sometimes considered one of the most sedentary and oldest European nations.

Baltic tribes started forming at the end of the 3rd millennium BC, when Indo-European newcomers subdued and assimilated local peoples. By the 1st millennium AD, the territory inhabited by the Baltic tribes stretched from the Vistula River to the Dnieper and Oka River basins. Later, in the second half of the 1st millennium, Slavic expansion resulted in the assimilation of the eastern Baltic tribes. The Prussian, Yotvingian, Lithuanian and Latvian tribes started forming in the early 2nd millennium, but from these tribes only the Lithuanian and the Latvian nations emerged. The Prussians and Yotvingians were conquered and assimilated by the Teutonic Order, which later founded the state of Prussia.

The Baltic tribes' settled way of life is probably the reason that Baltic mythology, elements of which are still found in folklore, retained many features of ancient Indo-European mythology. Interest in Baltic mythology keeps growing. Of all the living Indo-European languages, Lithuanian has retained the old system of sounds and many morphological features of extinct languages such as Hittite, ancient Greek and Sanskrit. The famous French linguist Antoine Meillet (1866–1936) once said, "If one wants to know how our ancestors spoke, they have to come and hear the Lithuanian country people speaking." Since Lithuania adopted Christianity relatively late, its folk culture and traditions are abundant in archaic elements pertaining to

pagan times. They are also present in the customs of Christian religious holidays such as Christmas and Easter. One could say that pagan celebrations were just "covered" by a Christian layer. All of these ancient remnants contribute to the distinctiveness of Lithuanian folklore and folk art.

Paganism and References to Lithuania in 1009

The subject of Lithuanian paganism has generated many controversial statements and speculations, mostly due to the preconceptions of the creators of the Romantic myth in the first half of the 19th century that the pagan epoch was the golden age of Lithuanians. Faced with a paucity of information in historical sources, Romanticists searched for images of anthropomorphic gods, idols, early writing, sages and temples, thus trying to detect features characteristic of pre-Christian Rome or the Greek and Roman religious systems.

Their opponents argued that Lithuanians did not have a religious system, but merely deified nature. Ancient Lithuanians saw manifestations of sacredness everywhere: in the canopy of heaven with its sun, moon and stars, and in fire, water, and the earth. Such deification of natural phenomena, particularly of the earth, however, retarded the development of agriculture. Sacred rituals therefore gradually became concentrated in specific holy places and associated with specific holy objects. They could be a concrete tree or rock, but it seems special significance was ascribed to oak groves, grass snakes and altar mounds.

To counter their critics, Romanticists cited Prussian sources dating back to the 16th and 17th centuries in which the chroniclers spoke about the Prussian gods. According to Simon Grunau's chronicle, the centre of the Prussian gods' cult was Rickoyoto (Lith. *Romuva*), where an eternally green oak grew and beneath which was a temple adorned with three idols portraying the three major Prussian gods. The most important of these was Pakulas, the god of the underworld, the second was Perkūnas, the god of lightning and thunder, and the third was Patrimpas, the god of grain. The cult of these gods and the hierarchy of the cultic leaders, priests and priestesses, were also described. The story of the trinity of Prussian gods was supplemented over time with new details and illustrated with pictures.

Four gods are referenced in the *Galician-Volhynian (Hypatian) Chronicle* for the year 1252. Lithuanian mythology confirms the idea that the nucleus

Lithuanian woods from the *Litwa* series of paintings by Artur Grottger, 1864–66.

of the Lithuanian high pagan pantheon consisted of four deities [*Dievas*, *Perkūnas*, *Velnias*], the fourth being a goddess [*Laumė, Laimė*]. For instance, there are objects with the word God (Lith. *Dievas*) in their names, such as a stone called "God's Table" [*Dievo stalas*] and a hill called "God's Throne" [*Dievo krėslas*]. There are a number of places, hills, forests, trees and rocks named after *Perkūnas*. The names *Laumė* or *Laimė* appear often. These early places of worship were guarded or watched over by high priests or seers (*žyniai*, probably originating from the word *žinoti* – "to know" in Lithuanian), priests (*vaidilos*) and priestesses (*vaidilutės*).

Some argue that paganism in Lithuania did not have time to establish major centres such as temples and other places of worship maintained by the community, with scriptures and educational institutions and a social class of clergy. However, they fail to take into account that Lithuanians only established a state in the mid-13th century. As a rule, the conditions for the emergence of clergy and an institution that manages religious affairs develop naturally in a state because a mechanism is in place to sustain them. Second, a state needs a unifying ideology. The rulers of other states

Merkinė fort hill. Wooden forts, important for the defence of Lithuania against attack, stood on such mounds in the 13th–14th centuries. Photograph by Mangirdas Bumbliauskas.

used Christianity for this purpose. The positions taken by Lithuania's pagan rulers showed that paganism was equivalent to Christianity for them. Thus, the state likely attempted to speed up the process of transforming paganism into an institutional religion from the top. A temple referred to in sources, the sanctuary of Romuva in Nadruvia, and its *krivis* (the chief pagan priest), can be deemed an early manifestation of this process. It probably was an independent institution sustained through donations. A high priest (*krivis*) settled in the territory of the weakest tribe (Nadruvia) to maintain political balance. This is reminiscent of the amphictyony of ancient Greece, a league of neighbouring city-states that shared and defended specific temples or holy places, especially in intertribal areas. The major cult object in Romuva was fire, with its worship reflected in the altar mounds or hilltop sanctuaries and altar stones so common in Lithuania.

The earliest written accounts about cremation (rather than inhumation) practices among the pagan Baltic tribes appeared in the 9th century AD. Myths about the origins of such cremation practices among Lithuanians (the legend of Sovii) appeared in the 13th century. The corpses of Lithuanian rulers were burnt on pyres in elaborate cremation rituals right up to the

time of Christianization (1387). Descriptions of the cremations of Grand Dukes Algirdas (1377) and Kęstutis (1382) survive in historical accounts.

Many nations created oral epics, with stories about gods, demigods and heroes. These stories were later written down. One could conjecture that a Lithuanian epic was in its nascent stages. Heroic songs appeared first, but very few are now known. Several stories written in the Lithuanian chronicles during the 15th–16th centuries may be considered epic narratives. They include Gediminas's dream about the founding of Vilnius, the Šventaragis legend, the military campaigns of Grand Duke Algirdas against Moscow, and the love story of the pagan priestess Birutė and the Grand Duke Kęstutis. (The story of Birutė is interesting from another perspective as well: she never adopted a Christian name or embraced Christianity, yet her legend lived on even in Christian times, and Birutė's Hill in Palanga was venerated as if she had been a saint. In 1989, archaeologists discovered a pagan sanctuary and observatory on the hill.) These narratives have an historical basis, confirmed by contemporary accounts, while other legends invented in the 15th–16th centuries, such as the Roman origin of Lithuanians (the Palemonas legend), do not.

The Balts differentiated into tribes in the 1st millennium BC. Ptolemy knew about the Prussian tribes of the Galindians and Yotvingians (or Sudovians) in the 2nd century AD. Western chroniclers started referring to Prussians, Curonians and Semigallians during the early Middle Ages. The Lithuanians, who lived to the east of these tribes, were not mentioned in these early annals, and, in any case, the process of differentiation among eastern Balts took place later.

The Lithuanian tribe seems to have been the most rapidly developing Baltic tribe at the end of the 1st millennium. That is probably why the Western missionary Bruno Boniface, who was later canonized as a saint (Saint Bruno of Querfurt), came to Lithuania from Prussia in 1009. Here he baptized the Lithuanian leader Netimer. However, the missionary was beheaded and his 18 companions killed by Zebeden, the brother of the newly converted Netimer.

In the *Annals of Quedlinburg* (1009), where Bruno's mission is described in a few sentences and Lithuania's name (*Litua*) is first mentioned in an historical source, Netimer is referred to as king (*rex*), and this fact is taken by some to mean that "chiefdoms" may have existed in the territories of Lithuania. Chiefdoms as defined by anthropologists are a form of social

organization more complex than a tribe but less complex than a state. Other chiefdoms may have existed in territories to the east where Christian missions were also sent at that time.

The historical mention of St Bruno's mission to Lithuania [*Litua*] is an important event in Lithuanian history because it is the first known mention of Lithuania in an historical document, but on the level of European history it is insignificant. For Lithuania, the year 1009 signifies much more than just the year a crime was recorded on its territory. This first Christian conversion in Lithuania is related to the millennialist interpretation of the *Book of Revelations* (*Apocalypse*) in the New Testament. Many early Christians expected the prophecies of the *Apocalypse* to unfold at the dawn of a new millennium, and missionaries were motivated to proselytize in non-Christian lands as they awaited the coming of Judgment Day.

As the 1st millennium of the Christian era drew to a close, Christian missions and Christianization spread to new countries and regions in Central, Eastern and Northern Europe. The following chain of events is noteworthy: the baptism or christening of Mieszko, the ruler of Poland (966); the baptism of Vladimir the Great, the ruler of Kievan Rus' (988); St Adalbert's mission to Prussia which ended in martyrdom (997); the beginning of Christianization in Norway by Olaf, the King of Norway (997); the decision taken by the Althing of Iceland to be Christianized (1000); the coronation of St Stephen, the first real Christian on the Hungarian throne (1000); the baptism of Olaf, Duke of Southern Sweden (1008); and finally the baptism of Netimer, the "King" of Lithuania (1009).

So nearly a thousand years passed after Tacitus's mention of the *Aesti* (Balts) before Lithuania was mentioned for the first time in an historical account. During that time, the Lithuanians developed a distinct ethnic identity and progressed under Netimer's rule from a tribal system to a state worth visiting by missionaries. But Lithuania retained its language, mystical polyphonic songs (*sutartinės*), legends, tales and pagan gods. The country retained its pagan face for more than 400 years after Netimer's rule, until its rulers and people were converted to Christianity in 1387. Even though Grand Duke (later King) Mindaugas had been baptized in 1251 as a precondition for making peace with the crusading Livonian Order, the crusader attacks did not cease. Between 1263, when Mindaugas was assassinated, and 1387, Lithuania's rulers were pagan and the country retained its traditional religious practices.

Mindaugas Establishes the State of Lithuania

The Curonians appear to have been the most active and militant of the Baltic tribes during the 11th–12th centuries. Lithuanian military campaigns began at the end of the 12th century. The Lithuanians are known to have launched their first independent military campaign into the lands of Rus' in 1183, during which they devastated Pskov and probably Polotsk on the way. Their military campaigns later became more frequent, with one or two campaigns per year, and conducted not only in Russian lands but also Poland and Livonia.

Marauding campaigns demonstrated the growing power of Lithuania. The number of their campaigns surpassed those of the wealthy Prussians and the militant Curonians. This was probably due to the large number of men that could be mustered – a particularly important factor in military campaigns. The rise in the number and power of the Lithuanian tribe laid the foundations for changes in the form of governance and led to the establishment of a state.

Mindaugas, the future founder of the Lithuanian state, was listed fourth among the five senior Lithuanian dukes that concluded a treaty between Volhynia and Lithuania in 1219. It is clear from this treaty that Lithuania was not yet a state in 1219, but a confederation of lands without a single ruler. The land was the unit of political organization at the time. Each land had its own chief or duke (*kunigaikštis*). They formed a confederation (or loose military alliance) in order to increase their power and better coordinate their military activities. Senior dukes emerged from among them. In order to consolidate his own power and create a state, Mindaugas forced some dukes to become his vassals and drew others into his political sphere of influence.

As the Volhynia treaty attests, Lithuania did not yet have one chief or grand duke in 1219. But the German *Livonian Rhymed Chronicle* (covering the period 1180–1290) referred to Mindaugas as "Supreme King" in 1245–1246. So Lithuania must have been united by then, but when did this happen? Russian chronicles refer to "Mindaugas's Lithuania" in 1235. This may indicate that Mindaugas had already consolidated his power by then. We do not know for sure because there is no exact record, and so the approximate (and somewhat arbitrary) date of 1240 has been chosen to mark the establishment of the Lithuanian state.

Teutonic knight abducts a child. Painting by Juliusz Kossak, 19th century.

In uniting Lithuania, Mindaugas undoubtedly took a number of factors into account. The Order of the Livonian Brothers of the Sword, which established itself at the mouth of the Daugava River in present-day Latvia in 1202, was gradually conquering the Livonians [Livs], Latvians, Estonians and Curonians. To aid in his fight against pagan Prussian tribes related to the Lithuanians, Konrad I of Masovia invited the crusading Teutonic Knights (Order of Brothers of the German House of Saint Mary in Jerusalem) to settle in the land of Chelmno by the Vistula River in 1230. The Poles and Lithuanians would pay dearly for this fatal mistake. The Order subdued the Prussians and the Pope declared a crusade against the Lithuanians in 1236. Although the Samogitians defeated the Livonian Brothers of the Sword at the Battle of Saulė in 1236, the pincers began squeezing Lithuania, especially after the Livonian Brothers of the Sword became the vassal of the Teutonic Order in 1237.

The emergence of the state of Lithuania was accelerated by the aggression of the German knights and the establishment of their colonial states on the

Mindaugas's coronation. Painting by Adomas Varnas, 1952–53.

shores of the Baltic. The state of Lithuania appeared primarily as a defensive measure. Its basis was the warrior class – the military forces gathered together by Mindaugas. The consolidation of power by a single ruler is the most distinctive external feature of an emerging state. From today's perspective one can say that a nation can protect itself only by establishing a state.

However, Mindaugas still had to consolidate his power. His situation became very precarious in 1248. His rule was challenged by his nephews, who sought out external allies – the Livonian Order and Volhynia. Mindaugas managed to overcome this opposition not only through military campaigns but also through diplomacy. He took advantage of internal conflicts in the Livonian Order to make peace with the order's master, Andreas von Stirland. The conditions of this peace included the baptism of Mindaugas and his nearest relatives as well as the cession of a large part of Samogitia to the Livonian Order. In the spring or early summer of 1251, Mindaugas, his wife Morta (Martha), their two sons, courtiers and many Lithuanians were baptized and the crown was secured for Mindaugas.

With the approval of Pope Innocent IV, Mindaugas was crowned King of Lithuania in the summer of 1253 and became a Christian monarch. Mindaugas's coronation day, celebrated as Statehood Day on July 6, is an important national holiday in Lithuania because Mindaugas was the first and only crowned king of Lithuania, founder of the Lithuanian state, and the first ruler to formally introduce Christianity into Lithuania. His coronation effectively concluded the establishment of the state, as Lithuanian

statehood was recognized by contemporary Europe. The creation of the state allowed the nation to survive and later adopt Western civilization.

Lithuania stepped onto the historical stage as the European crusades to the Holy Land were coming to an end. The Seventh Crusade (1248–1254) took place during the reign of Mindaugas and the last two crusades (1270–1272) shortly after his death. Unlike his predecessors in Central Europe several centuries earlier, Mindaugas had to accomplish more and do it more quickly. Bohemia became a kingdom in the 12th century but established an independent archdiocese only in the 14th century. Poland became a kingdom and established an independent archdiocese at the turn of the 10th–11th centuries. Both became vassals of the Holy Roman Emperor rather than the Pope. Since Mindaugas was crowned under the auspices of the Livonian Order, a Papal vassal, he, too, became a vassal of the Pope and was immediately granted the right to an independent diocese subordinate to the Pope. After several years, Mindaugas received permission from the Pope to bequeath his crown to his son. All these developments were a result of Mindaugas's diplomacy and politics.

Mindaugas shrewdly selected Christian (Lith. Kristijonas), a brother of the Livonian Order, to advise him. Christian provided him with information about the organization of the Catholic Church and the Pope's relations with European leaders, especially the Holy Roman Emperor. After bribing Andreas von Stirland, the Master of the Livonian Order, with many lavish gifts, Mindaugas sent an envoy to the Pope, stating his conditions for accepting Christianity, and these were more favourable to Lithuania than Livonia. To the great surprise of the Livonian delegates, the Pope agreed to Mindaugas's requests. This was the first major international victory for Lithuanian diplomacy. Mindaugas protected Lithuania from political ties with the Holy Roman Empire. These important diplomatic achievements show that Mindaugas expertly steered the course of events in his favour.

The term Medieval Europe generally refers to the course of events in Western Europe, but this is not a complete picture. Developments in Western Europe are now sometimes referred to as the "old" medieval Europe (5th–9th centuries). It is the Carolingian Empire, or the Europe created on the ruins of the Roman Empire, stretching to the river Elbe. The "new" medieval Europe – Bohemia, Hungary, Croatia and Scandinavia – was formed during the 10th–12th centuries. Extending this chain of devel-

opment into the 13th and 14th centuries, one might consider the area of Europe where the Finns, Estonians, Latvians, Prussians and the Lithuanians lived as the "newest" medieval Europe.

During the Early Middle Ages in the "old" medieval Europe, states could accept Christianity on their own and then become vassals of the Pope or Emperor. During the High Middle Ages, in the "new" medieval Europe, states were able to choose Christianity and become the Emperor's vassals. But during the Late Middle Ages, in the "newest" medieval Europe that included Lithuania, states were no longer given the right to choose. The Baltic Crusades had begun. The Finns, Estonians and Latvians were conquered and the Prussians were annihilated. In spite of all of this, Mindaugas not only managed to establish a state, but also to briefly enter the European state system. He was the only ruler in the "newest" era of medieval Europe to be able to establish his nation and state as an historical entity.

In 1263, Mindaugas and two of his sons were assassinated by Daumantas of Pskov, in collusion with Mindaugas's greatest rival, his nephew Treniota. After the death of his wife Martha, Mindaugas had forcibly taken Daumantas's wife (Martha's sister) as his own, so Daumantas's motive may have been personal, but historians generally consider the assassinations to have been a reaction on the part of the pagans against Mindaugas's baptism and his attempts to make peace with the Teutonic Order.

During the Livonian Crusade, at the Battle of Durbė on 13 July 1260, the Samogitians, who never recognized the cession of a large part of their lands to the Livonian Order as part of Mindaugas's baptismal agreement, crushed the joint army of the Teutonic Knights and the Livonian Order. In the aftermath of that victory, the Samogitians, through the intercession of Treniota, asked Mindaugas to renounce his baptismal vows and to wage war with Livonia. Mindaugas went to war, and some historical sources assert that Mindaugas reverted to paganism before his death, but this is not clear, since Pope Clement IV in his bull of 1268 (five years after Mindaugas's assassination) refers to "Mindaugas of happy memory" (*clare memorie Mindota*). In any case, the baptism of Mindaugas did not eliminate the threat posed by the Orders and, moreover, part of ethnic Lithuania (Samogitia) had been lost, making it very difficult to unite the Balts. Mindaugas, in choosing war with Livonia, had to fight for pagan Samogitia against Christian Livonia, and at the same time maintain the status of a Christian ruler in the eyes of Western rulers and the Pope.

The assassination of Mindaugas led to turmoil. Three of his successors were also assassinated within seven years and one was expelled. Vaišelga (Vaišvilkas), the only surviving son of Mindaugas, became ruler of Lithuania when his father's supporters killed Treniota in 1264. He was the first known Lithuanian duke to be converted to the Greek Orthodox faith. His conversion marked the start of the incursion of Lithuanian dukes into the lands of Rus'. They would first adopt the Orthodox faith and then incorporate their lands into the GDL. In the case of Vaišelga, it was the lands surrounding Navahrudak, which had been granted to him by his father. But he had renounced his patrimony to enter a monastery. Nevertheless, as the only surviving son of Mindaugas, he was the legal heir to the throne. So after Treniota was slain, Vaišelga left his monastic life and for three years was the Grand Duke of Lithuania (1264–1267).

Rise of the Gediminids

The following grand dukes of Lithuania are also mentioned in historical sources from the end of the 13th century: Butigeidis, after him his brother Butvydas, and later Butvydas's son Vytenis. Familial succession – when members of the same family, brothers or sons, inherit the throne – was a new phenomenon in Lithuanian history. The principle of succession to the throne, one of the most important indicators of a state's stability during the Middle Ages, was established. Those wishing to accede to the throne had to demonstrate their rights – kinship or membership in a ruling dynasty. The most famous dynasty of Lithuanian rulers, the Gediminids, began its reign at the end of the 13th century, when Lithuania began to emerge as a military monarchy with all its characteristic features, including the formation of manors (*kiemai*) and other early forms of feudalism.

The Gediminid dynasty was named after its most famous representative, Gediminas (reigned 1316–1341), the brother of Vytenis. Gediminas was not the first representative of this dynasty, but his historical role overshadowed those of his predecessors. Vilnius first became known as the capital of Lithuania during the reign of Gediminas. The first reliable reference to Vilnius is found in the letters of Gediminas addressed to German cities and religious orders in 1323. During his rule, masonry construction began to be widely utilized, especially for fortifications. To protect it from attack,

Gediminas builds Vilnius castle.
Painting by Michał Elwiro Andriolli, 1882.

stone castles were built in a broad ring around Vilnius, the state's nucleus, at Medininkai, Krėva, Lida, Trakai, Grodno and Kaunas.

Lithuania became the centre of a political system surrounded by the lands of Black Ruthenia and Polotsk, which were annexed under Mindaugas, as well as the lands of Volhynia, Halych, Kiev and Pskov, which were within Lithuania's political sphere of influence. Lithuania became a major political force in the region, a great power. Its politics influenced not only the wider region but came to be reckoned with throughout Europe.

The letters of Gediminas (1323–1325) reflect his political aims and strategies. Although they are most often cited as the first written reference to Vilnius, they also demonstrate that Gediminas had a consistent strategy to make Lithuania European. They also show that he had a very broad political outlook, bearing in mind the international isolation of Lithuania at that time.

Gediminas created an Orthodox metropolitanate in Lithuania, with the episcopal see in Navahrudak, sometime between 1315 and 1317. It had

Sixteenth-century drawings of Mindaugas, Gediminas, Algirdas and Vytautas by Alessandro Guagnini. Paintings of Kęstutis and Birutė by A. Penkowski, 1838.

only two metropolitans (bishops) and was discontinued in 1371. Its establishment was an attempt by the GDL to compete for religious control of the Rus' principalities with the Grand Duchy of Moscow. Gediminas also expressed willingness to be baptized and establish a Catholic archdiocese. His religious policies attracted the interest of Pope John XXII, who was already raising the idea of an ecclesiastical union between the Catholic and Orthodox churches. Gediminas sent letters to the Pope that expressed his desire to be baptized, noting that the rulers of Lithuania wanted to adopt the Catholic faith, but were forced to defend themselves against the Teutonic Knights, who were more interested in conquest than in Christianization. Gediminas also sent letters to German cities and monasteries, saying he was waiting for the Pope's envoys to negotiate baptismal terms. He also invited German knights, merchants, craftsmen and even peasants and their families to come and settle in Lithuania, promising them the same working conditions as in Europe. Pressured by the staunchly pagan Samogitians and his Orthodox courtiers, however, Gediminas informed the Pope's legates in Vilnius in 1324 that he had rejected the idea of baptism.

The rejection of baptism did not mean that Gediminas abandoned his other goal of inviting German colonists as a means of bringing Lithuania closer to Western Europe. Franciscan and Dominican friars, mainly from Saxony, were already in Lithuania when Gediminas began his rule. Franciscans drafted Gediminas's correspondence and a Dominican acted as the grand duke's adviser on Catholic affairs. Christians and non-Christians were free to worship God according to their faith and customs, but could not interfere with one another. In about 1339–40, during the reign of Gediminas, two Franciscan friars from Bohemia, who had gone beyond their authority and had preached in public against the Lithuanian religion, were executed. Their martyrdom forms the basis of one of Vilnius's most enduring legends. A chapel was constructed on their burial site at the beginning of the 16th century. Later, the monastery of the Brothers Hospitallers was built nearby.

Lithuania's pagan society – its economic, social, political and spiritual structure – acquired its most mature form under Gediminas. The Gediminids stepped onto the stage of Lithuanian history at the end of the 13th century. They were the most prominent Lithuanian dynasty and ruled Lithuania until the death of Sigismund II Augustus in 1572. After his death, Lithuania was ruled by rulers of non-Lithuanian origin. The most famous

and important Lithuanian grand dukes belonged to the Gediminid dynasty. They included Algirdas and Kęstutis, the sons of Gediminas, Algirdas's son Jogaila, and Kęstutis's son Vytautas the Great, the dynasty's most famous representative (reigned 1392–1430). After Jogaila (Pol. Jagiełło) became King of Poland (1386), he began the Jagiellonian dynasty, a branch of the Gediminids. This branch reached its apogee of power and influence in the late 15th to early 16th century when its representatives simultaneously sat on the thrones of Lithuania, Poland, Bohemia (1471–1526), and Hungary (1490–1506).

In the nation's historical consciousness, the reign of the Gediminids is considered Lithuania's most glorious era. A particularly honourable place is accorded to its most famous representatives: Gediminas, Algirdas, Kęstutis and Vytautas. The Columns of the Gediminids is one of the most important symbols of the Lithuanian nation and state.

THE PAGAN STATE AND CHRISTIANITY

Every Lithuanian ruler after Mindaugas sought a *modus vivendi* with Western Christianity. The ongoing wars with the German military orders were the driving force. After conquering the Prussians at the end of the 13th century, the Teutonic Order began attacking Lithuania. Lithuanian rulers realized that baptism by the Order would be too costly, and thus sought other channels to the Catholic Church through Bohemia, Hungary and Poland. An Orthodox baptism would not have solved the problem with the German orders.

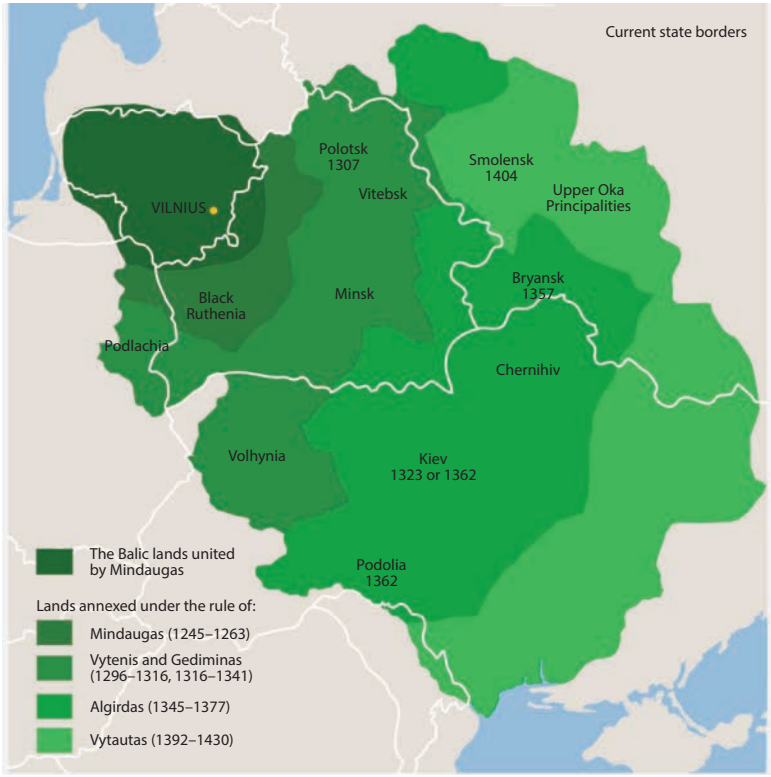
It should be noted, however, that Lithuanian rulers already referred to themselves as kings. For example, Gediminas referred to himself as *rex* in his letters to the West, and Algirdas called himself *bazileus* in his letters to the Byzantine Empire. German historical sources refer to them in a similar way, unlike references to the leaders of tribes without a state or even to dukes of Russian lands. We would therefore venture to state that at least until Jogaila became King of Poland in 1386, Lithuania was, in effect, a kingdom, despite not having proper recognition from the Christian West – a unique kingdom outside the Christian system. In some ways, Lithuania could even be considered an independent civilization, because it could not be assigned to either Latin Western Europe or Byzantine Eastern Europe. True, individual holdings were becoming the norm in Lithuania, a charac-

teristic of Western civilization that did not develop in the Orthodox East. Where formal recognition was not required, where a nation's own powers were sufficient, pagan Lithuania was recognized as a regional force, a great power (Pol. *mocarstwo*, Rus. *derzhava*, Ger. *Grossmacht*), a step away from an empire.

In his letters, Gediminas, who titled himself *Rex Lethowye* (King of Lithuania), intensively negotiated baptismal terms with the Roman Catholic Church and other political entities and invited Western merchants and craftsmen to Lithuania. For a long time, these efforts to reduce Lithuania's political isolation produced no results and the military aggression of the Germanic orders forced Lithuania to devote all its energy to warfare. That is why the 14th-century administrative structure of Lithuania is sometimes described as a military monarchy.

Thus it is in the area of warfare that Lithuania made its first technological contribution to the region and Europe by introducing a distinctive kind of "Lithuanian" (or "Prussian") shield. It was rectangular in shape with a convex longitudinal section in the middle running the length of the shield. The hollow on the inside of this section was for the arm of the warrior and the straps and handles which held it in place. The shield was adopted in Masovia in the early 13th century, in Navahrudak by the mid-14th century, and in other Polish lands and Bohemia by the early 15th century. By way of the Prussians, it was also adopted by the Crusaders.

The crusades against Lithuania may partially explain the nation's expansion into the lands of Kievan Rus', which had been devastated by the Mongols. This was a way to accumulate resources for fighting in the West. During the reign of Grand Duke Algirdas (1345–1377), Lithuania not only became a great power, but also considerably expanded its territory. Lithuania thus became a bicultural country made up of the ethnic pagan Lithuanian lands in the West, near the Baltic Sea, and the much wider expanses of the more densely populated Orthodox lands of the Ruthenians in the East. In these eastern lands of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, separately from the Russians of Muscovy, a Slavic Ruthenian nation began to form from which the modern Belarusian and Ukrainian nations later developed. Lithuanians found something in these lands that they did not have: an organized church and a written language. Both of these circumstances meant that Orthodox culture played an important role in Lithuania's early history. As they became vicegerents in the lands of ancient Rus', Lithuanian dukes



Expansion of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania in the 13th–15th centuries.

adopted the Orthodox faith. The Ruthenian language, written in Cyrillic, became the chancellery language of the GDL (Chancery Slavonic). This is somewhat analogous to what occurred when the Franks, a confederation of Germanic tribes which established a state and administrative structures in Gaul (currently France), adopted the local people's language and culture.

Lithuania under Algirdas

During the 13th century, the Mongol Empire under Genghis Khan stretched from the Sea of Japan to Central Europe. This Empire vanquished Kievan Rus' and Lithuania took advantage of that to subjugate certain Ruthenian lands. Black Ruthenia was annexed to Lithuania under Mindaugas; White Ruthenia and Volhynia under Vytenis and Gediminas (Polotsk in 1307, Vitebsk in 1320, and Volhynia in 1340). In other words,

the whole of present-day Belarus and part of western Ukraine became part of the Grand Duchy. In the early 1320s, a Lithuanian army led by Gediminas defeated a Slavic army led by Stanislav of Kiev and captured Kiev, but did not gain full control of the city from the Tartars (a Mongolian and Turkic people) until Algirdas defeated the Golden Horde in the Battle of Blue Waters (1362).

Under the rule of Gediminas and Algirdas, not only did the territory of the GDL expand, but Lithuania also became a significant power in Central and Eastern Europe. Were it not for the Mongolian invasion, the GDL may not have been successful in annexing the territories of Kievan Rus'. The Lithuania of the 14th century most resembles a shadow empire. Such empires arise on the periphery of collapsing empires, when former subjects, clients or allies of the collapsing empire subdue part of its territory, including metropolitan areas. Usually, the collapsed empire's administrative structure and cultural heritage are also adopted.

The Russian principalities were subjects of the Golden Horde (part of the fractured Mongol Empire) and regularly paid tribute to its Khan. Even though Lithuania annexed many Russian lands, both Gediminas and Algirdas had to pay tribute to the Golden Horde for the right to rule those lands. (Only under Grand Duke Vytautas did Lithuania stop paying tribute to the Mongols.) In other words, the Russian lands of the GDL were, in effect, a condominium of Lithuania and the Golden Horde. Other Russian principalities competed for the territories devastated by the Mongol invasion that were not part of the GDL, the strongest of which was the principality of Vladimir-Suzdal.

At the beginning of the 14th century, Tver and Moscow became major rivals in a fight for the *yarlik,* a privilege granted by the khans to collect taxes for the Golden Horde from other Russian dukes. Moscow won the fight and also imposed its rule on Vladimir. In an effort to help Tver recover its losses to Moscow, Algirdas organized three campaigns against Moscow (in 1368, 1370 and 1372), but was unable to seize the Kremlin. Algirdas's aspirations that "the whole of Rus' should belong to the Lithuanians" and that Vilnius should become the "second Kiev" went unrealized. Nevertheless, Algirdas called himself the "Emperor of the Lithuanians" (*vasilea Letvon*) in a letter written to the Patriarch of Constantinople in 1371, amid his campaigns to Moscow. In this way, he elevated himself above the dukes of Moscow, Tver and other Russian principalities and compared himself with

the Byzantine emperor. Lithuanian rulers understood well not only the West's political system, but also the East's.

The expansion of the GDL into the lands of Rus' took many forms, from direct conquest to other means of exerting influence and power. It is clear that no land would voluntarily choose to be occupied by an outside force, however benevolent. Byzantine sources do not refer to Lithuanians as peaceable, but rather as a "brave and militant nation". Even dynastic marriages took place under direct military pressure.

The Lithuanians were probably imperialists in the same way as other conquerors, although when they occupied a foreign land, they did not immediately move to change the administrative or social order of the society. Their tactics are most accurately described by the following saying of Lithuanian dukes: "We do not destroy the past or introduce new ways." They maintained the old structures of the duchies, which later turned into regions that retained a great deal of autonomy. The Ukrainians have a joke that the Lithuanians were the best invaders in their history. The reason for such relations was hardly Lithuanian generosity or peaceableness. Lithuania could not impose its language, culture or religion on others because paganism was unable to compete with the Orthodox Church, which had its own institutions and written language. The GDL is therefore sometimes called a "velvet empire". The peripheral territories of the GDL exhibited various degrees of suzerainty and hegemony. The Gediminids who ruled the farthest from the centre in Vilnius, and that included all of Ukraine, were most independent of their Vilnius brothers, cousins or uncles who were the grand dukes.

Lithuania in Orthodox Rus'

When the GDL occupied the lands of Kievan Rus', the Lithuanian dukes who became vicegerents or rulers in these territories often adopted the Orthodox religion. Later, prominent GDL families arose from these territorial rulers on the periphery of empire – such as the Sanguszko, Czartoryski, Wiśniowiecki and Słucki families. The Orthodox faith was adopted even by dukes who were not members of the ruling Gediminids and whose patrimony was in the centre of the GDL, such as the dukes of Halshany [Lith. *Alšėnai*, now in Belarus]. It should also be noted that not all dukes from the Rus' Rurik dynasty were forced out of political life when

Lithuania occupied their lands. In later centuries, we will find that some prominent Lithuanian families descended from these dukes.

In the lands of Rus', Lithuanians found stone-built Orthodox churches and monasteries. Within them were paintings, church art and collections of writings, and, most importantly, monks able to write. Lithuania did not have its own written language then. Latin reached Lithuania later, whereas the GDL's Slavic subjects already had the Ostromir and Turov Gospels, written in the 11th century. Christian concepts such as baptism (Slavic *kreshchenie,* Lith. *krikštas*) or church (Slavic *božnitsa*, Lith. *bažnyčia*) came into the Lithuanian language not from the Latin West but from Rus'.

The contact between pagan and Orthodox societies was most apparent in the capital Vilnius. This is reflected in the history of old Vilnius, where in the 14th century a "Ruthenian quarter" (*civitas Ruthenica*) already existed. The Rus'ians living in the GDL were becoming a new nation of Ruthenians, who were rather different from the Russians of the Duchy of Muscovy. From the time of Gediminas, there were Orthodox churches in the "Ruthenian quarter". Some of the wives of the Lithuanian grand dukes were Orthodox and there were Orthodox believers in the ruler's court. Algirdas tolerated the Orthodox religion as long as it did not conflict with his interests as ruler.

Orthodox courtiers, who learned to write in Orthodox monasteries, helped to establish the ruler's chancellery. The written language used in those monasteries was a form of Old Church Slavonic developed in the First Bulgarian Empire (9th and 10th centuries). In the GDL Chancellery, a somewhat different language developed – Ruthenian (Old Belarusian), sometimes also called Chancery Slavonic. This was the language used to write the *Lithuanian Metrica*, a collection of the 14th–18th century legal documents of the GDL Chancellery; the *Lithuanian Statutes,* legal codes of the GDL; and other important Lithuanian chronicles. It could be said that the Lithuanian political elite became consumers of Orthodox culture.

The western part of the GDL, between Vilnius and Lutsk, was not just an area where noblemen liked to establish residences for representational purposes or because of its proximity to Krakow. The fertile land in the Bug and Narew river basins made this the major grain-producing area of the GDL and the breadbasket of Europe. Grain from this part of the GDL was exported to Gdansk, a major port that shipped it to the rest of Europe. Lithuanian influences on Ruthenian society are most evident in the development of the rural economy. The Lithuanian gentry and peasants came

from a society engaged in individual farming with personal property (allodial) rights which differed from that of the eastern Slavs (in the Duchy of Muscovy and later Russia), where communal land ownership was the norm. In the Ruthenian lands that belonged to Poland and Lithuania, the western type of farming and land ownership was adopted. An allodium was an estate or plot of land over which the peasant owner or hereditary lord had full ownership and disposal rights.

Since this type of farming and land ownership was new to Ruthenia, the Ruthenian language began to incorporate Lithuanian terms. Thus in documents of the *Lithuanian Metrica* from the 15th–16th centuries we find such terms as: *litovka* for a type of scythe, *doilida* (Lith. *dailidė*) for a carpenter, *jevje* (Lith. *jauja*) for a barn for storing crops, *sviren* (Lith. *svirnas*) for a granary barn, klunia (Lith. *kluonas*) for a threshing barn, *orud* (Lith. *aruodas*) for a cornbin, and *primen* (Lith. *priemenė*) for an entry hallway. Even Lithuanian culinary delicacies made it into the Ruthenian language: *kompa* (Lith. *kumpis*) for ham and *skilond* (Lith. *skilandis*) for a distinctive Lithuanian sausage. These terms were also used in Ukraine.

The ancient Lithuanians did not have a written language and it is hard to determine what the national consciousness of an illiterate society might be. But the Lithuanian grand dukes who laid claim to territories inhabited by Baltic tribes were aware of their affinities, and Vytautas based his claim to Samogitia on a common language. On the other hand, regardless of language, all subjects were subordinate to the grand dukes. The Crimean Karaites and Tartars, who were settled in Lithuania by Grand Duke Vytautas, became his trusted personal guard rather than his fellow Lithuanians. Nor did Lithuania's rulers trust in the adequacy of local skills, and so they invited merchants and craftsmen from abroad. Germans, Jews and Armenians settled in the GDL. Nearly all of these communities (with the exception of the Germans) became collective vassals of the grand dukes while maintaining their own faith and languages.

The Christianization of Lithuania: the Completion of Christian Europe

During the second half of the 14th century, aggression by the Teutonic Order against Lithuania reached unprecedented intensity,

with three to four crusades per year. Lithuania's strength was exhausted and it was forced to seek an ally. The Treaty of Krėva (Krewo), concluded with Poland in 1385, provided a solution. Under the treaty's terms, Grand Duke Jogaila of Lithuania was to be crowned King of Poland after wedding Jadvyga (Pol. Jadwiga), the reigning Polish monarch. The treaty also stipulated the Christianization of Lithuania, which Jogaila undertook after returning from Poland in 1387. The political aspects of Christianization were paramount, and they became evident in a fairly short time. The Pope enjoined the Teutonic Order from attacking Lithuania. From that time on, the Order's military campaigns could not expect much effective support from the West; many knights from other states refused to participate. The alliance with Poland engendered by the Treaty of Krėva enabled the decisive victory of the combined Lithuanian and Polish armies against the Teutonic Knights at the Battle of Grunwald (Lith. *Žalgiris*) in 1410. By accepting Christianity and defeating the Teutonic Order, Lithuania eliminated a 200-year-old threat against its existence and entered a new stage of its history, namely, the epoch of "Europeanization" or the "road to Europe".

On 14 August 1385, a Polish delegation arrived at Krėva Castle (near the town of Ashmyany, now in Belarus). The Poles apparently brought a prepared treaty document for Jogaila to approve and sign. Jogaila accepted the terms outlined in the document, it was approved, and became known in history as the Treaty of Krėva (Krewo). In addition to the royal marriage and the introduction of the Catholic religion into Lithuania, the treaty conditions stipulated that Lithuania help Poland regain lost lands, release Polish captives, and "attach" (*applicare*) Lithuania to Poland.

The word "attach" must be written in quotes because the proper translation and connotation of the Latin word *applicare* is still being debated by historians. Among its meanings is "to annex or attach" (Lith. *prijungti*) and "to link or connect" (Lith. *sujungti*). During the Middle Ages, there was no precise legal definition for this term. It was used to describe "incorporation", that is, annexation or attachment of lands whereby they become a constituent part of the incorporating state's lands. *Applicare* was also used to describe the acquisition of foreign lands *in feudum*, as tribute, whereby the state being incorporated does not lose its statehood, but becomes dependent and ceases to be sovereign.

Jogaila, like most early monarchs, had autocratic powers – the state was his property and he could do with it what he wished. In agreeing to

the terms of the Treaty of Krėva, Jogaila needed only the approval of his family. In Lithuania, there were no other state institutions. The treaty was guaranteed by the seals of Jogaila's brothers Skirgaila, Kaributas, Lengvenis and their cousin Vytautas. In Poland, the monarch had to get the approval of other state institutions, such as the King's Council and the already existing nobiliary parliament (*Sejm*). By this treaty, Jogaila did not renounce his rights to Lithuania as a patrimony and Lithuania did not lose its statehood; rather, it became a vassal state of Poland (the second use or meaning of *applicare*). More precisely, Jogaila, the Grand Duke of Lithuania, became the vassal of Jogaila, the King of Poland. The nature of this vassal relationship was not defined by the treaty or in any other legal document. It was to be worked out somehow by the two states in practice, and that is where the greatest future threat to Lithuania's statehood lurked. At first glance, it seemed that there was parity between the two states. Duchies were distributed to the Gediminids in Poland and Polish officials that received the ruler's authorization were sent to Lithuania. The Lithuanian army assisted the Poles and the Polish army assisted the Lithuanians. However, in the first instance, Lithuanians in Poland were subject to Polish state institutions, while Poles in Lithuania were subject only to the common ruler, who resided in Krakow, the capital of the kingdom, and was answerable to those same Polish state institutions. When Lithuanian officials were integrated into Polish state institutions, they lost much of their power and influence. The nature of the relationship between states resulting from this personal union of Jogaila and Jadvyga corroded Lithuania's statehood.

The ferocity of the attacks by the German military orders had forced Lithuania to conclude such an unfavourable treaty. On the eve of the treaty's signing, Lithuania's strength was waning and the Poles saw many advantages to a union with Lithuania. After the treaty's conclusion, Lithuania's independence diminished. Was there an alternative path to Europe other than the alliance with Poland? The past 200 years of history had shown that the German military orders were bent on conquest and were not an option. Lithuania's closest neighbour was Poland and the Act of Krėva opened a new page in the nation's history as it turned to Poland.

In 1387, Jogaila returned to Vilnius to baptize the Lithuanians. Lithuanians of noble descent and their families were invited to Vilnius and each person was sprinkled individually with holy water. The commoners were offered shirts and woolen garments by the ruler, who stood as their godfa-

Lithuania is depicted walking at the end of the procession of European nations towards the cross in a fresco in the St Pierre-le-Jeune Church in Strasbourg, early 15th century.

ther, to entice them to come and be baptized. Some thus came more than once. The Celtic and Germanic tribes were baptized in a similar way. Since the number of people wanting to be baptized was so large, they were baptized in groups as they stood in a river. The pagan religion was prohibited and its attributes destroyed. The sacred groves were felled, their sacred fires extinguished.

A cathedral was constructed in Vilnius on the site of a former pagan temple and was solemnly consecrated in honour of St Stanislaus, the Bishop of Krakow ("so that both nations, possessing equal rights, would have one patron and intercessor"). The main altar was situated where the eternal pagan flame, the sacred fire, used to burn. On 17 February 1387, Jogaila granted to the Bishop of Vilnius a privilege establishing the Diocese of Vilnius. This privilege was the most important document in the introduction of Christianity to Lithuania. On February 22, Jogaila issued a decree in which he committed to converting all Lithuanians to Catholicism even if force were necessary. On 19 April 1389, Pope Urban VI recognized the status of Lithuania as a Roman Catholic state.

Thus Jogaila, who turned the last pagan nation in Europe into a Christian one, removed the major reason for its political isolation. The political

benefits were soon apparent. In 1403, the Pope forbade the Teutonic Order from attacking Lithuania. Christianization thus became the important ideological underpinning in Jogaila and Vytautas's diplomatic dealings with the Teutonic Order on the eve of their major military confrontation.

The major changes that took place after Christianization were external. With Christianization came the building of churches, institutions unknown to pagan society. They were not only new architectural monuments, repositories for paintings and other ecclesiastical art works as well as ecclesiastical books, but also educational institutions. Through these institutions new ideas spread in Lithuania. The concept of death changed, as did burial rites. The number of cremation burials typical of paganism fell significantly in the late 14th century. The Church's teachings about a single God, original sin and Christ's redemption undoubtedly affected the people's consciousness. To a person raised under paganism, not only the concepts of compassion and charity but also that of sin must have been new, especially the idea that one could sin not only in deed but also in thought. The admonition to love one's neighbour as oneself acquired a specific interpretation in the relationship between lord and vassal, placing on the lord responsibility for the vassal's salvation. In other words, vassals were told what religion they should profess.

Feudal relations thus acquired an ideological basis that sanctioned the highest lord's – the ruler's – continuity in power and the inheritability of his office. The medieval notion of social class derives from the tripartite division of feudal society into warriors, clergy and labourers (the *tripartitio christiana*). During the Christianization of Lithuania, Jogaila granted privileges not only to the Bishop of Vilnius, but also to the nobility and gentry by confirming their ownership rights, and to the townspeople of Vilnius by granting them the right to self-governance. The Christianization of Lithuania gave birth to a class-based society.

THE EMPIRE OF VYTAUTAS

The reign of Vytautas (1392–1430), the grandson of Gediminas, was a time of epoch-making transformations. In 1392, the Grand Duchy of Lithuania was an illiterate country without schools, without large cities and guild craft industries, without a heavy cavalry to act as a striking force on the battlefield. Its ruler Jogaila became King of Poland and was recognized internationally, but as a result the GDL

The Great Seal of Vytautas.
Reconstruction by artist Kajetan Wincenty Kielisinski, 1841.

lost its status as a sovereign state. The Teutonic Knights were still a threat. And yet by 1430 the GDL reached its apogee of power. Vytautas's imperial power was felt throughout the region.

At the Congress of Lutsk (1429), Lithuania was declared a sovereign state and only unfortunate circumstances prevented it from becoming a kingdom. The danger posed by the Teutonic Knights had been eliminated. Crafts and trade developed rapidly throughout the country and a class of wealthy landlords emerged who were able to arm themselves well. A network of chancelleries was established, the first schools appeared, and chronicles started to be written. This historical process was created not by Vytautas alone, of course, but the whole of Lithuanian society, and particularly its elite. But it was Vytautas who managed to make the most of his opportunities to create the conditions for European culture to flourish.

Changes during the Reign of Vytautas

The significance of the changes under Vytautas was understood by his contemporaries, whose profuse praise and high regard led to his being called "the Great". First, Vytautas ceased paying tribute to

the Mongols, abolished the old system of partial duchies (duchies parcelled out to sons of dukes), appointed vicegerents to these duchies and took all power into his hands. Lutsk came under Vytautas's direct control in 1393. He abolished the Duchy of Kiev in 1394 and handed Kiev over to his cousin Skirgaila. In 1395, he appointed a vicegerent in Podolia. Only the smaller duchies remained.

However, the most significant changes under Vytautas were social in nature – the development of a class of landed knights. The large-scale assignation of peasants to the gentry meant that the Gediminids in occupied territories became landlords. Land was also given to Lithuanian newcomers who were castle dwellers. Most importantly, a loyal class of local people was created and loyal local dukes were recognized.

After the Lithuanian political elite converted from paganism to Christianity in 1387, the cultural differences between the state's Catholic nucleus and the Orthodox periphery were more evenly balanced than in pagan times. Orthodox believers were prohibited from holding the highest state posts, and the construction of Orthodox churches was forbidden in the nuclear state. The cultural advantage of Orthodoxy in a pagan state disappeared in a Catholic state as the Lithuanian political elite also became the cultural elite. However, this led to a new problem – confessional dualism (paganism had not played an equivalent role). The state's ethnic "Catholic" nucleus covered just 10% of the territory and encompassed only 20% of the population. The nucleus was certainly much more densely populated and nearly half (some claim more than half) of the GDL cavalry came from these ethnic lands. Yet no other European state had such a huge body of subjects professing another religion.

Vytautas had to deal with this confessional dualism. While intensively creating a network of Catholic institutions, he also turned his attention to issues facing the Orthodox Church in the GDL. In 1415, at a church council in Navahrudak, Vytautas attempted to re-establish the Metropolitanate of Lithuania (which existed briefly under Gediminas, ca 1315), by appointing the Bulgarian writer and cleric Gregory Tsamblak as Lithuanian metropolitan, but his efforts were only partially successful because the Patriarch of Constantinople would not recognize Tsamblak in that position. Nonetheless, the local bishops consecrated Tsamblak as the metropolitan of Kiev and he served in that role from 1414 until 1420. A cathedral and residence were built for the metropolitan bishop of "Kiev and All Rus'" in Vilnius.

The bishop's jurisdiction was established in the Ruthenian Quarter of Vilnius, and it existed until the late 18th century. Tsamblak led a delegation of GDL Orthodox believers to the Catholic Church's Council of Constance (1414–1418) in Germany, where they proposed an ecumenical union of the Western and Eastern churches.

Under the rule of Grand Duke Vytautas, the GDL started to resemble a true empire. His reforms were radical. Lithuania's expansion to the East split the Rus'ian lands into two – Kiev and Muscovy. For several centuries the historical paths of these centers diverged. Vytautas's centralization policy consolidated the resources of a broad expanse of Eastern European territory. Volhynia, which Vytautas started to consider part of his patrimony, was most integrated into the life of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. Here the secondary branches of the Gediminid dynasty became established. For example, patrimonies were established in Volhynia by the Sanguszko family (in Kovel, and later Slavuta), the Czartoryski family (Klevan), the Wiśniowiecki family (Vyshnivets) and by other families who descended from these branches. Land was acquired and patrimonies were also established by the noble Radziwiłł and Chodkiewicz families, in Olyka and in Mlyniv respectively. Finally, the princely Ostrogski family of Rurik descent (and therefore "Ukrainian"), from Ostroh in Volhynia, played an extremely significant role in the history of the GDL.

Many old empires that later fell are remembered as prisons of nations. Those that did not fall became melting pots of nations. Such melting processes also took place in the GDL. The broad adoption of the Polish language was a key factor. This did not, however, result in a total Polonization of the GDL, but rather gave rise to the birth of several modern nations – Lithuania, Belarus, and Ukraine. Thus the GDL is remembered in history neither as a prison of nations nor a melting pot, but rather as a cradle of nations. This is the most important distinguishing feature of the GDL empire.

The Battle of Grunwald

Although the Pope prohibited the Teutonic Order from waging wars with Christian Lithuania, Samogitia (western Lithuania) still belonged to the Order and the Order was still a power that posed an existential threat to the Lithuanian state. It also threatened Poland because the Order controlled the Baltic littoral (Pomerania), Poland's only access to

the sea. Poland, however, was not as hard-pressed as Lithuania. Through his emissaries, Vytautas tried to persuade Poland that war with the Teutonic Order was a necessity. Jogaila was not eager to wage war because, if defeated, he could lose the Polish throne. In the end, Vytautas successfully made his case and Jogaila and the Poles agreed to challenge the Order in battle.

In early July 1410, the GDL's military forces joined the Polish army at the Vistula River. Since the entire GDL army was withdrawn from Lithuania, its castles remained unprotected and vulnerable to a sudden attack by the Order, especially on the Nemunas River. This would have led to disaster. But Vytautas tricked the Order by ordering the Samogitians to attack its castles repeatedly and thus conceal the withdrawal of the Lithuanian army to another front. Vytautas's plan was bold and unexpected because the Order was normally the aggressor in wars with Poland and Lithuania. Now the Teutonic Order's territory had been invaded and the invaders were marching straight toward the enemy's capital with the strategic objective of confronting all the Order's forces head-on.

On 15 July 1410, the joint Polish and Lithuanian armies (50 banners and 40 banners respectively) confronted the army of the Teutonic Order (51 banners) near the village of Grunwald. The estimates of the total number of soldiers engaged in the battle vary greatly, from 16,000–39,000 for the Polish-Lithuanian army and from 11,000–27,000 for the Teutonic Knights. Serving with the Polish-Lithuanian army were regiments from the Ruthenian lands.

The tactical positions of Vytautas and Jogaila were very different on the morning of the battle. Vytautas wanted a decisive military victory, while Jogaila waited for the Order to negotiate. He procrastinated by attending Mass and blessing the knights. Jogaila thought that the size of the allied army, the demonstration of power, would be enough to force the Order to start negotiations and that the allies would be able to dictate their terms. Vytautas feared this the most, because he saw the opportunity not just to demonstrate power but to achieve a decisive military victory and crush the Order. This was vital for Lithuania and without the help of Poland it would be unable to do so. Vytautas waited for Jogaila's order to start the battle, but the order never came. Jogaila's procrastination made Vytautas nervous. Even the Polish knights began to mutter. Vytautas therefore took a risk and ordered the Lithuanian army into battle.

Battle of Grunwald. Vytautas the Great is in the centre.
Painting by Jan Matejko, 1878.

The leaders of the Teutonic Knights quickly took advantage of the Lithuanian army's temporary isolation. The Order's army was arranged in three wedge-shaped formations. One of the wedges was aligned against the Poles, and another against the Lithuanians. They constituted the front. At the start of the battle, the Lithuanians were attacked by heavy cavalry consisting of guest knights and mercenaries led by the Grand Komtur Kuno von Lichtenstein. The Lithuanian army withstood this attack for an hour and suffered huge losses. Vytautas's soldiers started to retreat as the situation became critical. In medieval battles, a powerful counterattack was usually followed by a retreat, and then by an attack against the enemy across the flanks. The Lithuanians could not behave like this at that point because the Poles had not yet started fighting, and the exposure of their flank might have been considered treason. Vytautas therefore had to wait for the Polish forces to join the fight and to hold back the right flank of the Teutonic Knights. That time was bought with human lives: Vytautas was forced to stop and turn round those banners that were retreating too fast.

Fortunately, the battle on the allies' left flank was finally joined along the entire front. At the last moment, the Lithuanians were able to enact their false retreat manoeuvre. The Teutonic Knights broke rank and started pursuing the enemy, but soon had to flee themselves from the Lithuanians, who turned around and started fighting again. However, the fleeing Teutonic Knights were intercepted by the Poles. The left flank of the Order's army was completely destroyed in this way. Meanwhile, the Poles' heavy cavalry made use of their advantage in numbers after joining the fight, and started pressing the Order's right flank. Ulrich von Jungingen,

Grand Master of the Order, had no choice but to retreat with his reserves into the forest. But the Poles and Lithuanians also had reserves. They attacked both flanks of the Order and brought the battle to an end. The army of the Teutonic Knights was surrounded and destroyed. Grand Master Ulrich von Jungingen, the majority of the Teutonic leadership, more than 200 of the Order's knights as well as other soldiers and their servants perished. According to one estimate, about 8,000 Teutonic soldiers were killed, and another 14,000 captured.

The victory at the Battle of Grunwald changed the geopolitical status of Lithuania and Poland. Although two more wars were necessary to regain Samogitia, the Order's hegemony was undermined at the Battle of Grunwald. The Order no longer posed an existential threat to either Poland or Lithuania. The Battle of Grunwald entered into history as one of the largest battles of the Middle Ages. The Poles and Lithuanians divided the captives, the beards of the Order's komturs, the banners, and the Order's territory between them. The Battle of Grunwald was jointly won by both Lithuania and Poland.

Neither side expected such a victory. The joint forces of Lithuania and Poland also suffered great losses, with only every second person returning to Lithuania. Vytautas, field commander of the joint armies at Grunwald, though relatively unknown as a military leader on the morning of 15 July 1410, won the epoch-making battle and achieved renown by evening of the same day, and his name is sometimes mentioned alongside those of great European military leaders such as Turenne, Marshal of France; Prince Eugene of Savoy, the Austrian military leader; Frederick II, King of Prussia; and Alexander Suvorov, Marshal of Russia. Comparisons of a heroic Vytautas with Alexander the Great and Julius Caesar by his contemporaries constituted part of Vytautas's image. The other part of the image was Vytautas as a sacred ruler.

Grunwald and Vytautas have become an important component of the GDL's tradition and ideological legacy. Having withstood aggression from the West for 200 years, the GDL managed to survive a period when its very existence was threatened, when its role was perceived by the West as merely a barrier or boundary between the East and the West. Vytautas knew well what he was seeking – he was fighting not against the West, but for a place in the West. In this way he laid the foundation for Lithuania to become part of Europe.

Sacred Ruler

Vytautas believed that in one of the battles that he lost he was saved by the Blessed Virgin Mary. Right after the battle Vytautas founded a church in Kaunas dedicated to the Blessed Virgin Mary. In fact, most churches that Vytautas founded were named after the Blessed Virgin. One might say that Vytautas started the tradition of worshipping the Blessed Virgin Mary in Lithuania, even though his role in the country's Christianization was overshadowed by Jogaila. His main goal was to see Lithuania take its place among the Catholic countries of Europe. The Teutonic Knights hindered him from doing it. But after the Battle of Grunwald Vytautas founded churches and monasteries, Samogitia was Christianized (1413), a Samogitian diocese was established (1417), and a wide campaign about these achievements was carried out in the West to publicize Lithuania as a Catholic country.

Moreover, attempts were made to establish a separate Lithuanian Catholic Church province as well as to create an Orthodox metropolitanate or bishopric in Lithuania and join it to the Catholic Church. The popes, however, were very cautious about establishing new archdioceses and ecclesiastical provinces. The Council of Florence (1439), convoked shortly after Vytautas's death, was unable to unite the Eastern and Western Churches. However, Vytautas's ecclesiastical policies laid the foundations for Lithuania's further Christianization.

The major conflict with the Teutonic Order was over Samogitia. The core of this conflict is best explained through an interesting story: a conversation took place between Vytautas and Michael Küchmeister von Sternberg, the leader of the legation of the Teutonic Order, during negotiations in Salynas (near Kaunas) on 28 January 1413. When Küchmeister declared that Lithuania did not adhere to the terms and conditions of the Treaty of Thorn (Torun), that it did not tear down Veliuona Castle and return the surrounding land to the Order, Vytautas retorted: "You want to rob me of my patrimony and take away Veliuona Castle. Many will have to perish before I let you take it away." When Küchmeister responded that the Order had "solid documents and evidence" for their claims, Vytautas became furious and told him that "Prussia is also part of my inheritance and I will claim territory to the Osa River, because that is my patrimony." And then Vytautas asked the marshal ironically: "And where is the Order's patrimony?"

Vytautas used historical and ethnic arguments to rebut the Order's claims to Samogitia. In his opinion, earlier documents relating to the bequest of Samogitia lost their legal power when Lithuania became a Christian country. As his patrimony he claimed nearly all the Prussian lands up to the Osa River, the right tributary of the Vistula, south of which lay the land of Chelmno, that had been granted by the Masurian dukes to the Germans. In this respect, Vytautas followed the policies of earlier Lithuanian rulers – namely, expanding the state throughout the entire territory inhabited by the Balts. Later, however, he laid claim only to that part of Samogitia that was on the right bank of the Nemunas River, including Klaipėda; and Užnemunė, a Lithuanian region on the left bank of the Nemunas River.

Thus Samogitia remained the main source of contention with the Order even after the Battle of Grunwald. Victory on the battlefield did not mean that all territorial and political goals were achieved. Rumours spread in the West that Jogaila and Vytautas had achieved a false victory by using pagans and Muslim Tartars. Vytautas and Jogaila therefore started baptizing the Samogitians in 1413. Vytautas sent the previously mentioned Orthodox delegation headed by Metropolitan Gregory Tsamblak of Kiev to Constance in 1418 to seek unity between the Western and Eastern churches. The ecumenical Mass celebrated by Tsamblak in the cathedral of Constance made such a great impression on contemporaries that it was described in detail in chronicles of the time. A figure carrying the banner of Lithuania (*Litavia*) is depicted marching last in the early 15th-century fresco entitled "The March of Nations toward the Cross" in the St Pierre-le-Jeune church in Strasbourg. A place in this solemn procession was earned by virtue of Lithuania's conversion in 1387 and the impression its delegation made at the Council of Constance.

Vytautas focused his politics on relations with the Church and completion of the conversion of Lithuania, a process which did not end with the Christianization of the Samogitians. He was very much concerned with his image as a Christian ruler and maybe even harbored aspirations to sainthood, a status higher than "the Great". There was precedent for that. Several rulers at the turn of the first millennium who brought Christianity to their people, such as Vladimir the Great of Kiev and King Stephen of Hungary, were later canonized as St Vladimir and St Stephen in their respective churches. Vytautas faced a formidable task: he not only had to bring Christianity to pagan Lithuania but also to seek accommodation with Ortho-

doxy. His coronation plans should be viewed in the context of Lithuania's Christianization and Europeanization.

Vytautas began formulating his coronation plans only after he accomplished his major political goal of ensuring the safety of Samogitia and Lithuania from further threats by the Teutonic Order. A new Polish-Lithuanian military campaign against the Teutonic Knights in 1422 led to the Treaty of Melno, which established the Lithuanian-Prussian border for the next five centuries.

Vytautas started asserting his independence from Poland towards the end of the 1420s and this aggravated relations between the two countries. In 1427, he marched to Moscow to help his grandchild Vasily II, son of his only daughter Sophia, secure the throne of Moscow. Vasily was only 10 when his father died, and his mother acted as regent. The demonstration of Vytautas's power alone was sufficient to secure the throne at that time, though a civil war later broke out. The campaign consolidated Vytautas's eastern domains. Pskov was annexed in 1426 and Novgorod the Great in 1428.

It seemed that only a crown was lacking for Vytautas to achieve his second political goal – to secure Lithuania's place as a kingdom in the European political system. The hegemony of Poland rather than Lithuania was becoming more evident in the region, and relations with Poland became the major political problem for the GDL after the Treaty of Melno settled border issues with the Teutonic Knights. The plan to crown Vytautas became important on an international level because the region's most important issues could not be resolved without Lithuania's active participation.

The European Congress of Lutsk (9–29 January 1429) was convened to discuss political issues in Central and Eastern Europe, including the coronation of Vytautas. It was attended not only by Vytautas of Lithuania and Jogaila of Poland, but also Sigismund I, King of Hungary and future Holy Roman Emperor; envoys of the Grand Duke of Moscow and the Duke of Tver; the Dukes of Ryazan, Odojev, Novgorod the Great and Pskov; the papal legate; envoys of the Teutonic Order, the Golden Horde, Moldova, the King of Denmark and the Emperor of Byzantium; and other dignitaries. The Congress of Lutsk demonstrated the importance of the GDL and Vytautas's role in the region, and has gone down in Lithuanian history as the culmination of Vytautas's coronation plans. Establishing Lithuania as a kingdom was supported by Sigismund I and the Teutonic Order. Their aim

Congress of Lutsk. Painting by Jonas Mackevičius, 1934.

was to create a counterbalance to Poland in the region. Vytautas's decision to accept the crown offered by Sigismund and his declaration that he was doing this "without asking anyone's permission" meant that he was on the verge of becoming an independent sovereign.

The Congress of Lutsk logically completed Vytautas's complicated political path, begun toward the end of the 14th century, and brought him to his ultimate goal: the establishment of a Lithuanian monarchy within the European political system. Even though the goldsmiths of Nuremberg had already made crowns for Vytautas and his wife Juliana, the crowning ceremony did not take place because the Polish Council of Lords forced Jogaila to revoke his consent. Vytautas received Jogaila's consent again in 1430 and merely needed the approval of the Polish nobility, but unfortunately Vytautas died on 27 October 1430 before receiving that approval. Although the coronation plan was not fully implemented, Vytautas achieved his main political aims: the state of Lithuania, previously isolated and backward, eliminated the major threats to its existence, became part of Europe and stayed European.

The Lithuania of Vytautas most closely resembled a state sometimes referred to as an empire today. Lithuania later weakened, and in those times of trouble when national unity was needed, Vytautas became a myth which provided strength, inspired dignity and encouraged patriotism. The start of his cult dates back to his reign. Enea Silvio Piccolomini (later Pope Pius II),

in his *Book about men famous for their lives,* wrote the following about Vytautas: "How great are You and how great Your native land." The cult of Vytautas was particularly fostered during the 16th century, when Lithuanian society started looking for ideological support against the Jagiellonian dynasty's plan to create a union of the two states in which Poland would be dominant.

THE GRAND DUCHY OF LITHUANIA ON ITS PATH TOWARD THE WEST

Under Vytautas, the foundation was laid for Lithuanian society to become firmly established in Central Europe, making "a leap in civilization". Lithuania had to rapidly adopt medieval social structures and practices that came from Western Europe: feudalism with its class system, guilds, the ecclesiastical system and schools, and writing and the institutions necessary for correspondence and documentation.

No other European state had to make so many changes so rapidly. Lithuania managed to do it in a hundred years. The enrolment of young Lithuanians at the University of Krakow, and later at German and Italian universities, played an important role in this process. Their studies, as well as the general adoption of European culture, produced concrete results by the end of the 15th and the first half of the 16th centuries. St Anne's Church, a Gothic masterpiece, was built in Vilnius around 1500. Francysk Skaryna began to publish books in Lithuania in 1522. The *First Lithuanian Statute* (1529), the code of laws of the GDL, surpassed many medieval European legal codes in its comprehensiveness and Renaissance "execution". The code greatly influenced the law in neighbouring regions such as Livonia, Muscovy and Poland. The first book in the Lithuanian language was published in 1547. The fact that Lithuania reacted within a few decades to the challenges of the Protestant Reformation, which began in 1517 in Germany, shows that the Lithuanian state had become an integral part of the European whole.

During the 16th century, Lithuania and Poland were in a process of convergence. With a few rare exceptions during this period, Lithuania was ruled by the same monarchs as Poland, sharing a common dynasty, but the states remained separate. The Jagiellonian dynasty was of Lithuanian origin

and sat on the thrones of Poland and Lithuania until 1572. At the end of the 15th and the beginning of the 16th centuries, the dynasty also ruled Bohemia and Hungary. The eastern part of Central Europe became "Jagiellonian Europe" and the Jagiellonian dynasty was a major rival of the Habsburg dynasty. Jagiellonian Europe started playing the role of an "outpost of Christianity" (*antemurale christiantatis)*, but was not always successful. Lithuania, with the assistance of Poland, withstood Orthodox Muscovy and won a victory at the Battle of Orsha in 1514, while Hungary suffered a defeat in the Battle of Mohács against the Turks in 1526 and disappeared from the map of Europe. When Bohemia "slipped" from Jagiellonian rule, only Poland and Lithuania remained.

During the 16th century, the society of the GDL became fully integrated into Western European civilization. The GDL became a feudal society with fiefs and vassals, where land was held in exchange for service or labour. In the cities, guilds were formed. The European system of education was adopted. Cathedral schools, colleges and universities were founded. A Christian mentality became prevalent among the society's elite. A nation of nobles began to form with their own historical self-awareness and genealogical chronicles.

Christianization, St Casimir and Gothic Architecture

The baptism of Lithuania (1387) and Samogitia (1413–1417) marked only a small step towards formation of a truly Christian society because only the most important pagan places of worship were destroyed. Local places of pagan worship remained as an alternative to Catholic churches. The Church aimed to integrate pagan beliefs, but Catholic saints only very slowly replaced the pagan gods. Both coexisted in people's consciousness for a long time. Nevertheless, by the beginning of the 16th century Christianity was the religion of the entire gentry class, fully reaching the peasantry only in the 17th century.

The cult of St Casimir (1458–1484), son of the Grand Duke of Lithuania and King of Poland Casimir IV, became the symbol of Lithuania's Christianization. By the beginning of the 16th century, Prince Casimir was worshipped in the Vilnius region. His cult began to replace that of St Stanislaus, the patron saint of Poland. Prince Casimir was canonized after he

started to become famous for his miracles. According to popular belief, he saved Lithuania in the wars with Muscovy by helping the Lithuanian army defeat the enemy at Polotsk in 1518 and to win the battle at the Daugava River in 1519. St Casimir's cult showed that a strong religious identity had formed in Lithuania that was oriented towards Western Europe. After his canonization (1604), St Casimir became the most important patron saint of Lithuania and Vilnius. The tradition of *Kaziukas* (a Lithuanian diminutive for Casimir) fairs, which are still celebrated with great fanfare every March, date back to these GDL times.

The Europeanization of Lithuania cannot be imagined without ecclesiastical organizations. After Christianization, four Catholic dioceses (Vilnius, Samogitia, Lutsk and Kiev) were founded alongside the already functioning Orthodox dioceses in the GDL. By the mid-16th century, seven monastic orders (the best known being the Franciscans and the Bernardines) were established in the GDL. There were 18 monasteries, including four in Vilnius, two in Kaunas and two in Grodno. Ornate monastery churches were built, the interiors resplendent with luxurious altars, paintings, sculptures, frescoes and, from the end of the 15th century, organs. Everywhere parishes were established and parish churches built, even in places far from the diocesan centres. The network of parishes covered nearly all of Lithuania in the mid-16th century.

Gothic art and architecture originated in 12th-century France and flourished into the 16th century. The vertical lines of Gothic churches and towers rising into the sky symbolized the human striving to reach God. When the Gothic style began appearing in Lithuania at the end of the 14th century, it already had a long 150-year tradition in Europe and had reached maturity, affecting all areas of human creative pursuits. In different regions of Europe the Gothic style was expressed in somewhat different ways. This was most evident in the architecture of sacred buildings. For example, in Western and Northern Europe, buildings were constructed of stone, while bricks were the main material for construction in countries where no suitable stone was available. Two distinct Gothic regions and types therefore developed. The Gothic red brick style came to Lithuania.

The spread of Gothic architecture in the GDL was prompted by the Christianization of the state and by the masonry church construction programme initiated by Vytautas: the Cathedral, the Church of the Sts John, the Franciscan Church of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary

The easternmost Gothic masterpiece in Europe –
St Anne's Church in Vilnius. Photograph by Arūnas Baltėnas.

in Vilnius; the Church of Sts Peter and Paul the Apostles, the Church of St George, the Church of St Gertrude and the Church of St Nicholas in Kaunas. Probably the best preserved is the Church of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary in Kaunas, popularly known as Vytautas's Church.

Lithuanian Gothic architecture is characterized by its defensive nature. Even churches had defensive towers and arrow slits, but most of the Gothic buildings constructed during the reign of Vytautas were castles. Vytautas built or reconstructed masonry castles in Vilnius, Trakai, Kaunas, Grodno, Navahrudak and Lutsk. With its Gothic ribbed vaults, the great hall of Trakai Island Castle is an example of the Gothic style of the defensive architecture of this period.

A true Gothic revolution took place in the GDL at the end of the 15th and in the first quarter of the 16th century, when the most significant architectural monuments were built in Kaunas and especially Vilnius. The Gothic style spread to the construction of residential buildings, reached the provinces (e.g., Kėdainiai and Zapyškis) and became predominant even in the architecture of Orthodox churches. Lithuanian Gothic architecture

adopted the main features of this style: high spaces (e.g., the central nave of the Bernardine church in Vilnius) and elegance (e.g., St Anne's Church in Vilnius). These churches were built by experienced master builders from abroad. Part and parcel of the Europeanization process was the "importation" of ideas, skills and goods from the West. Local craftsmen also became involved in the creative process, but their buildings were hardly of the quality of St Anne's Church. The reconstruction of Vilnius Lower Castle in the mid-16th century introduced new Renaissance architectural trends. Nevertheless, the Gothic tradition adopted by local craftsmen was still evident until the beginning of the 17th century.

As early as the reign of Vytautas it was evident that the epicentre of Lithuanian Gothic style was in the Vilnius-Trakai-Kaunas area. But castles were also built far from ethnographic Lithuania in the Ruthenian lands of the GDL: Black Rus' (Grodno and Navahrudak), Podlachia (Melnik and probably Brest) and even Volhynia (Lutsk). Gothic Catholic churches appeared on the borderlands of Orthodoxy, and even where Orthodoxy was prevalent. Gothic architecture even became an adopted style in Orthodox and future Greek Catholic churches in these areas.

The GDL magnate Konstanty Ostrogski, who reconstructed Orthodox churches in Vilnius and Navahrudak in the Gothic style, brought this style to his patrimony, Volhynia in present-day Ukraine. The GDL Gothic Orthodox churches had their analogues in residential architecture, such as the Mir Castle near Nesvizh. These Gothic buildings constitute a phenomenon in European cultural history, marking the easternmost boundary of European influence. Muscovy during the 15th–16th centuries was under the influence of Byzantine traditions. Any influence from the West was minor and no longer Gothic by the time it occurred. Italian Renaissance craftsmen appeared in the Kremlin at the end of the 15th century.

Script

At the turn of the 14th–15th centuries, as a class-based society was forming in the GDL and a complex state governing apparatus was being put into place, a system of writing and storing written records was urgently needed. In Western Europe, this function was usually performed by monasteries, but in the GDL at this time they were lacking, while the need for written records was rapidly growing. Chancelleries were

established to fill this need. Eventually they became producers of written documents, repositories and schools for scribes. Their activities contributed greatly to the spread of writing in the everyday life of the GDL gentry and townspeople. Lithuanian culture of the 15th and early 16th centuries is sometimes described as the culture of chancelleries.

The Lithuanian grand duke's chancellery was established as a permanent institution at the end of the 14th century. Until then, written documents were used only when dealing with other states. Diplomatic letters were written by monks who knew Latin. Within the country, edicts of the grand dukes were announced orally. As the state's internal life became more complex during the 15th–16th centuries, its administrative structure expanded and the grand duke's chancellery and its staff also grew. Scribes would accompany the grand duke on his journeys. Documents issued by the grand duke during these trips would be entered into the records of the chancellery upon his return. The records of the GDL chancellery are known as the *Lithuanian Metrica* (Lith. *Lietuvos metrika*). Other important historical documents of the GDL, such as the *Statutes* (legal codes) and chronicles, were also created in the chancellery. Some early writers, such as the mid-16th-century author whose pseudonym was Michalo Lituanus (Lith. Mykolas Lietuvis) were chancellery scribes or secretaries.

As the functions of the central authority expanded, the position of the GDL Chancellor was established in the first half of the 15th century to head the chancellery. He was authorized to supervise the compilation of the *Lithuanian Metrica*. This official guarded the seals of the state and ensured that no document that contravened the state's laws was drafted in the chancellery. A separate GDL chancellery, supervised by the Lithuanian chancellor, continued functioning even after the Union of Lublin with Poland was signed in 1569.

The *Lithuanian Metrica* consists of records accumulated in the chancellery of the Grand Duke of Lithuania from the end of the 14th century until 1794. It contains all documents sent and received on behalf of the GDL. State charters or privileges, as well as privileges issued to certain regions or cities of the GDL, acts confirming noble status, various land transaction records, inventories, wills, court rulings as well as local and international correspondence in Ruthenian, Latin, German (Prussian and Livonian), Arabic and Czech were kept as part of the *Lithuanian Metrica*. The documents in the *Lithuanian Metrica* thus constitute the history of the GDL's

policies, society, economy, law and culture. They are the most important sources of GDL history. The *Lithuanian Metrica* was taken to Moscow after the partitions of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth and has never been returned. It has become a symbol of the nation's scattered or stolen heritage and of the fate of the ancient state of Lithuania.

The main language of the *Lithuanian Metrica* , and the chancellery language of the GDL, was Ruthenian (Rus'ian), which was the language of the GDL's Orthodox believers and was spoken by ancestors of the Belarusians and Ukrainians. The Ruthenian language was chosen because there was no Lithuanian written language at the time, whereas the GDL's Orthodox subjects had a tradition of ecclesiastical writing dating back to the times of Kievan Rus' (late 9th to the mid-13th centuries). Orthodox monasteries in the GDL used the ecclesiastical Slavic language of Bulgarian origin (Old Church Slavonic). The language that evolved in the GDL chancellery was different. This difference was noted by contemporaries. In the latter half of the 16th century, the Ruthenian/Belarusian publisher Vasil Ciapinski printed documents side by side in two columns, one in Old Church Slavonic and in the other the newly emerging language, which is sometimes referred to as "West Russian," sometimes as "Old Ukrainian", and sometimes as "Old Belarusian". In Lithuania, however, it is known as the Chancery Slavonic of the GDL, despite the fact that it was also used outside the chancellery and the GDL, in Poland and in Hungary. Most importantly, it was different from the language spoken by the other Slavs of the GDL, namely, the Poles. In the beginning of the 15th century, it contained more words of Ukrainian origin, and later more words of Belarusian origin. Muscovite Russians clearly distinguished this language from Old Church Slavonic, which was the only written language in Muscovy until the 17th–18th centuries, and called it "Lithuanian". Today the language of the *Lithuanian Metrica* is sometimes referred to as "Old Lithuanian". This is purely an historical perspective. According to philologists, the written language which was predominant in the GDL chancelleries should be called "Ruthenian", and the East Slavs who lived in the GDL and the state of Poland should be referred to as "Ruthenians". After all, half the state of ancient Kievan Rus' became part of Lithuania and Poland. From the 14th century onwards, the identity of the Ruthenian gentry and nobility was affected by the processes taking place in these states. In the 16th century, the Ruthenians felt they were a completely separate nation, different from the Rus-

CATE-
CHISMVSA PRA-
sty Szadei, Makſias ſkai-
tima raſchta yr gieſines
del krikſczianiſtes bei del
bernelin iaunu nauiey
ſuguldites
KARALIAVCZVI VIII.
dena Meneſes Sauſia,
Metu vßgimima Diewa.
M. D. XLVII.
Soli Deo gloria

Title page of the first Lithuanian book, *Catechism*, by Martynas Mažvydas. Königsberg, 1547.

sians in the state of Muscovy. The East Slavs of the GDL referred to people from Russia as "Muscovites", while the Muscovites called the East Slavs of the GDL "Lithuanians". The GDL Slavs called themselves "Rus'ians", considered themselves a single ethnic group and the Lithuanian monarch as their own. In other words, the Ruthenians considered themselves separate from the Russians in Russia. Only in the 17th century did the Ruthenians diverge into two nations: Ukrainians in the south and Belarusians in the north.

Francysk Skaryna (1490–1541), Lithuania's first book printer, was ethnically Ruthenian. He was born into a family of wealthy merchants from Polotsk (Bel. Polatsk) in the GDL, received a doctoral degree in medicine from Padua University in Italy, and settled for a time in Prague, where he published a psalter and 22 books of the Old Testament under the common

title of Ruthenian Bible (*Biblia Ruska*, 1517–1519). He established a printing house in Vilnius in 1522.

A quarter of a century later, in 1547, the first book in the Lithuanian language was published – the famous *Catechism* by Martynas Mažvydas – but not in Vilnius or Lithuania proper. It was published in Königsberg, Prussia, where Mažvydas emigrated from Vilnius to escape persecution for his Protestant beliefs. It was dedicated to the GDL and was meant to introduce Lithuanians to the teachings of Martin Luther (it was based on Polish versions of Martin Luther's *Kleiner Katechismus*).

Mikołaj Radziwiłł the Black opened another printing house in Lithuania (Brest) in 1553, a development spurred by the Reformation. The printing house's impressive *Brest Bible* was published there ten years later. Radziwiłł the Black also established a printing house in Nesvizh (1562). The Chodkiewicz family started competing with the Radziwiłłs in 1569 by establishing a printing house in Zabłudów (northeastern Poland). To head it they engaged Ivan Fyodorov, the first Muscovite printer, who left Moscow after his printing house there burnt down, thus the house published Orthodox texts. When the Counter-Reformation began, Roman Catholics entered the book-publishing industry. Mikołaj Christopher Radziwiłł the Orphan, son of Mikołaj Radziwiłł the Black, who converted back to Catholicism, moved the Brest printing house to Vilnius in 1575 and donated it to the Vilnius Jesuit College, which was founded in 1570 and raised to the status of university in 1579. Book publishing became an ongoing enterprise in Lithuania.

As Western cultural ideas were adopted, Lithuanian society became acquainted with the chronicle-writing tradition in the West. This stimulated a growing desire to know one's own country's history. Myths about the foreign origin of rulers, which was widespread in Renaissance Europe, also became known. This created very favourable conditions for Lithuanian myth formation. The ancient history of Lithuania was unknown, the Lithuanian and Latin languages were similar, and so a legend about the Roman origin of the Lithuanian nobility (the legend of Palemonas) was created, and was even included in some of the Lithuanian chronicles (e.g., the Bychowiec Chronicle). The legend describes the arrival of Roman nobles in Lithuania, notes that there were people living there who did not know Latin, and that is all we learn about the local common people. For the chronicle's author, only the nobles constituted the nation. The legend

does not raise the issue of language, because language at that time was not the defining characteristic of a nation. There was no ethnic Lithuanian state then, but a political nation whose basic defining feature was the GDL nobility. Thus it was the origins and history of the nobles that are recounted in the Lithuanian chronicles. The legend of Roman origins, which was intertwined with the use of the language of the Romans (Latin) throughout the 17th–18th centuries, provided a certain counterbalance to Polonization. The adjective "palemonic" was sometimes used in ceremonial literature as an equivalent for the word "Lithuanian". Vilnius University was called "Palemonas's University" and the city of Vilnius – "the capital of Lithuania's palemonic cities".

Another subject important in forming the historical consciousness of the Lithuanian nobility was the reign of Vytautas. The first Lithuanian poem was a true creation of the Renaissance epoch. The poem, "A Song about the Appearance, Savagery and Hunting of the Bison" by Mikołaj Hussowczyk, published in 1523, aimed to depict Vytautas's reign as an ideal period, a model for contemporary society. Similar ideas can be found in the contemplations of Mykolas Lietuvis (Michalo Lituanus) about order in the state (*About the Customs of the Tartars, Lithuanians and Muscovites*, ca 1550), in which he contrasts the rigour and asceticism of customs in the era of Vytautas with society's feebleness, drunkenness and disorderliness during his day. Mykolas Lietuvis also proposed that the GDL change its language from Ruthenian to Roman (i.e., Latin). The determining factor in the further development of Lithuanian national consciousness, however, was the influence of Polish civilization on Lithuanian culture. This influence was felt in various ways: the organization of the ecclesiastical system, studies at Krakow University, adoption of the Polish administrative system and economic reforms. Poland became, in effect, teacher and exemplar for the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. Lithuania's problem was that its geographic location and historical development left little opportunity for direct contact with Western Europe and Europeanization usually ended up as Polonization. The consequences of this became most evident during the Reformation, when the importance of vernacular languages in national life began to be raised.

Renaissance and Reformation

There were already people with a broad humanist education in the court of Grand Duke Alexander at the turn of the 15th–16th centuries, but the breakthrough came when Sigismund I the Old married Bona Sforza, Duchess of Milan, in 1519. She brought Italian architects, artists and musicians to Poland and Lithuania, and instilled the spirit of the Renaissance in her son, Sigismund Augustus. With him she reconstructed the Vilnius Lower Castle into a Renaissance palace and introduced a number of innovations from "Italian strolls" (ballroom dancing) to forks, which were unknown not only in Lithuania but also the Scandinavian countries at that time. The Lithuanian nobility gradually adopted "Italian fashion". Renaissance literature could now be found not only in the library of Sigismund Augustus, but also in the libraries of the gentry and townsfolk. The myth of the Roman origin of Lithuanians led to a wide-spread misconception that Latin was the native language of Lithuanians.

The Reformation, which Martin Luther began in 1517, is considered one of the most significant developments of the early modern period. It swept across the whole of Europe in the 16th century, divided the Catholic Church and brought forth a new form of Christianity – Protestantism. Lithuania adopted Catholicism a thousand years later than most other European countries, but the Reformation arrived in a few decades, when Abraomas Kulvietis, a follower of Martin Luther, began preaching his tenets in Vilnius, probably in 1541. This relatively quick cultural transmission was the result not only of increasing Lithuanian interaction with Western Europe but also of Kulvietis's persona. He founded a school for the youth of the nobility in Vilnius, attended by 60 pupils, preached sermons criticizing the Catholic Church, and increasingly attracted adherents to his views. In 1542, he fled to East Prussia (Protestant since 1525) to avoid persecution and was granted protection by Duke Albert. Kulvietis propagated the Protestant view that it was important to use one's native language in communicating with God. He proposed making Lithuanian the language of the Lithuanian educational system, a reform in the national interest that would lay the foundations for developing a Lithuanian-speaking intelligentsia. Kulvietis tried to put his vision into practice while living abroad, when he and Stanislovas Rapolionis became the first professors at the recently established University of Königsberg (1544). The *Catechism* published

Mikołaj Radziwiłł the Black from the *Armamentarium Heroicum* by Jakob Schrenck, Innsbruck, 1603.

by Martynas Mažvydas in 1547 should be considered a fruit of this vision. Kulvietis was well aware of the problematic cultural situation. The Lithuanian nobility had never troubled itself to develop the Lithuanian written language and when Polish replaced chancery Ruthenian as the official chancellery language, the nobility increasingly used Polish not only for writing, but also in everyday life. Lithuanian society was thus unable to appreciate the significance of written Lithuanian and was therefore unreceptive to the idea of granting it official status.

Nobles who became involved in the Reformation movement during its second stage chose another branch of Protestantism – Calvinism – because it was better suited for their plans to weaken the grand duke's power, which

was in large part based on the authority of the Church, and they wished to lessen the influence of the Catholic Church in general. Mikołaj Radziwiłł the Black (1515–1565), the GDL Chancellor and Voivode of Vilnius, who published the *Brest Bible* in Polish in 1563, was the most prominent figure of the Lithuanian Reformation and the most influential personality among Protestants. By the sixth and seventh decades of the 16th century, most of the nobles had converted to Protestantism and converted the Catholic churches they had founded to Protestant ones. This was nearly half of all churches. Calvinism later waned, but has survived in Lithuania to the present time. Evangelical Reformed church members living in and around the town of Biržai in northern Lithuania today are direct descendants of the Calvinist reformers who were led by Mikołaj Radziwiłł the Red after the death of his cousin Mikołaj Radziwiłł the Black.

The Reformation created a new impetus for Polonization. Mikołaj Radziwiłł the Black said in 1563 that the Bible had to be translated into Polish (and not any other language) to make it "understandable to the people". Although Lithuanian writing and literature was beginning to emerge at this time, the GDL's political elite did not see a need for fostering Lithuanian culture and chose to promote Polish. The Lithuanian language was preserved only by the minor gentry and most steadfastly by the peasantry.

Despite the losses suffered in terms of Lithuanian identity, the society of the GDL in the 16th century became European and integrated into Western civilization. It became a class-based feudal society where the powers of the king or ruler were limited by law; where craft industries and guilds developed in the cities; and where the European educational system, with its cathedral and parochial schools, colleges and universities, was adopted.

Chapter II

UNION OF THE POLISH AND LITHUANIAN STATES

Lithuania became more European and culturally a part of Central Europe during the 17th and 18th centuries. During these centuries the northern part of Western Europe rapidly modernized its societies, Enlightenment ideas spread and capitalism developed. Central Europe and the southern part of Western Europe, meanwhile, remained agrarian, feudal, firmly Catholic, and baroque. Thus the history of Lithuania during the 17th and 18th centuries can be characterized as the Age of the Baroque, with the same cultural content as the Renaissance and the Age of Enlightenment in Western Europe.

The appearance of the Society of Jesus in Lithuania in 1569 may be deemed the symbolic beginning of this Baroque Age. The Jesuits brought with them a renewed Catholicism to Lithuania. With the help of the state, they were able to raise the level of secondary education in the country significantly by establishing a network of colleges, at the pinnacle of which was Vilnius University (founded in 1579). Lithuania's ambition to be an integral part of Central Europe was also evident in the creation of a strong and original school of military engineering, whose most significant work was Kazimierz Siemienowicz's *Artis Magnae Artilleriae* (The Great Art of Artillery, 1650). For several centuries, this treatise, translated into a number of European languages, was used as a basic artillery manual and recipe book for pyrotechnic formulations; it included descriptions of multistage rockets, batteries of rockets, and rockets with delta wing stabilizers (instead of the common guiding rod). Many of these principles are now used in modern astronautics.

The Jesuits were also responsible for the baroque influence on 17th and 18th century architecture and art. During the 17th century, "imported" baroque (especially Italian) dominated, while in the 18th century, a distinct Vilnius school of baroque architecture emerged, with Johann Christoph Glaubitz as its main architect. He undoubtedly deserves a place in the history of European baroque.

The agrarian nature of society and the weakness of the towns resulted in a variant type of monarchy in Poland and Lithuania. A monarchy in name, it became in fact a Republic of Nobles, tending toward anarchy. The right of *liberum veto* enjoyed by the nobles meant that every measure that came before the Sejm, or parliament, had to be passed unanimously. This principle was in stark contrast to the absolutist systems prevalent in Western Europe at the time, and hindered the strengthening and centralization of the state. On the other hand, a system that may appear anachronistic to the modern eye allowed for a society where various ethno-religious communities were able to coexist with Catholics: Calvinists, Lutherans, Orthodox Christians and Uniates (Eastern Rite Catholics), and later – Old Believers from Russia, as well as Karaites, Tartars and Jews, who were there from the times of Vytautas.

As its civilization progressed on the fringes of baroque Europe, Lithuania was dealt severe blows by its neighbours. During the reign of the Swedish House of Vasa (1587–1668), Lithuania and Poland were hit by the Deluge – the Russian and Swedish invasions of 1654–1667, and under the rule of the Saxon dynasty (1697–1763), Lithuania became a battleground for Russia and Sweden during the Great Northern War (1700–1721). A consequence of the latter war was Russia's direct interference in the internal affairs of Poland and Lithuania, which ultimately led to the partitioning and eventual abolition of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth.

THE COMMONWEALTH OF TWO NATIONS

The Union of Lublin

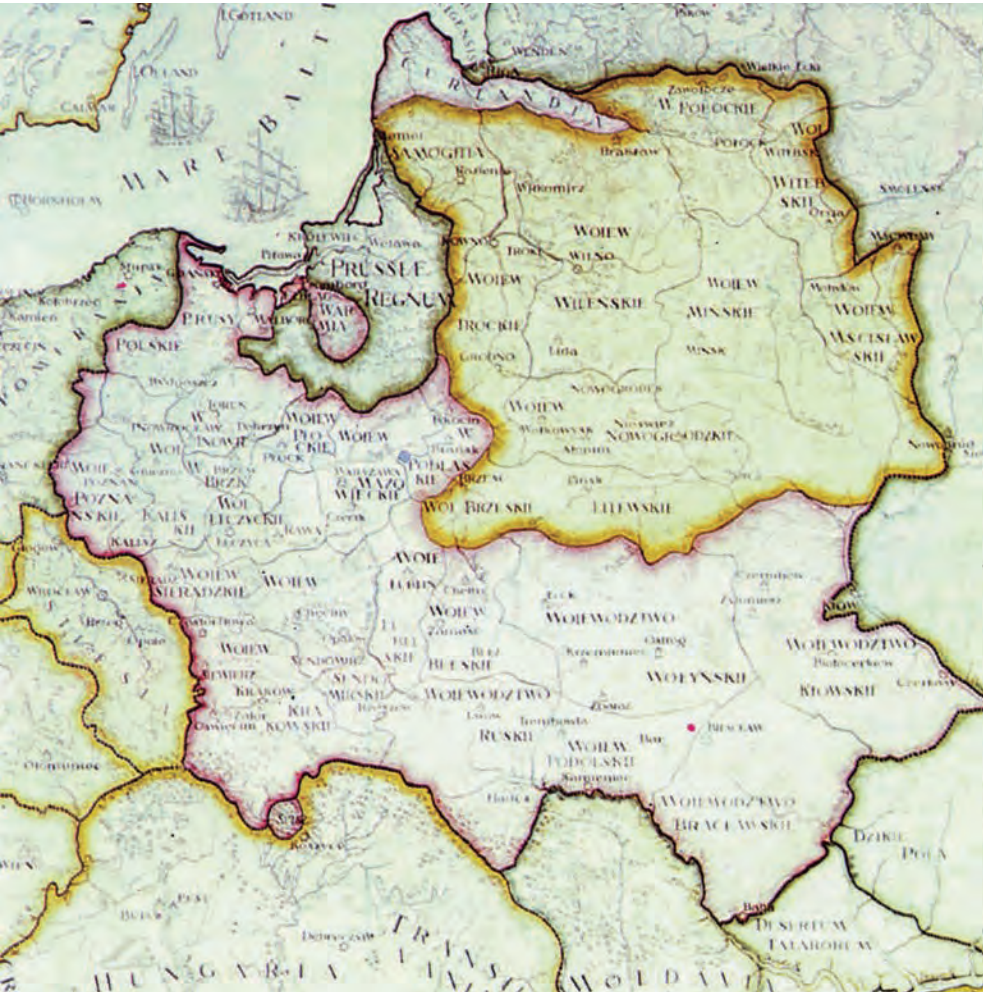
Lithuania and Poland's shared history began in 1386 with the marriage of Jogaila and Jadwiga. The metaphor of the "sacred marriage" is often applied to the entire process of developing closer ties through treaties that culminated in the Union of Lublin in 1569, which established a joint Polish-Lithuanian state: the Commonwealth of Two Nations. This was an original combination of states, a forerunner of the European Union in the sense of being more than an alliance but less than incorporation. Without closer ties between Poland and Lithuania and the alliance of their armies, victory at the Battle of Grunwald would not have been possible, and without the Union of Lublin, the successful conclusion of the Livonian War in the 16th century also would not have been possible.

In Poland, Lithuania is traditionally considered to have been part of Poland even prior to the Union of Lublin, and the state created by the Union of Lublin is often called the Republic of Poland rather than the Commonwealth of Two Nations. The lack of logic in this interpretation causes one to smile: if the union was a "sacred marriage", then who was the other party in the nuptials? Or perhaps this wasn't a union at all, but rather Poland's idea of a "civilizing mission"? Perhaps Poland was only interested in incorporating Lithuania? That is why the negative image of Poland's "civilizing mission" in the traditional historical memory of Lithuanians overshadowed the positive aspects of the union. Where Lithuanians traditionally saw the erosion of Lithuania's state and culture, Poles discerned a Polish "civilizing" victory.

The Grand Duchy of Lithuania had a difficult time holding the eastern front during the Livonian War with Muscovy. Total defeat and incorporation into Russia was a distinct possibility. Therefore a decision was made by the Vitebsk "battleground Sejm" to send the Elder of Samogitia, Jan Hieronimowicz Chodkiewicz, to Poland to ask for military assistance as well as for a union of the two countries. The need for Polish support was also demonstrated by the loss of Polotsk in 1563. Thus in February of 1569, Lithuanian and Polish delegations started union negotiations in the presence of the Polish Sejm assembled in Lublin. The Lithuanians presented their own plan – a union of two states with equal rights – while the Poles sought to annex Lithuania. Unable to reach an agreement, the Lithuanian delegation left Lublin on 1 March.

Then Lithuania was dealt a terrible blow: King Sigismund II Augustus came out in favour of Poland, and through legal acts incorporated nearly half of the territory of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania (the southern lands of Podlasie, Volhynia, Podolia, and the Kiev regions) into the Crown of Poland. All of the nobles in the incorporated areas were required to swear loyalty to the Crown of Poland, and their representatives had to participate in the Polish Sejm. Those who refused to swear loyalty had their lands confiscated. Lithuania was in danger of losing its sovereignty.

Jan Hieronimowicz Chodkiewicz understood the tragic dilemma: either Lithuania was to bind itself to Poland, or Russia would conquer Lithuania. He chose the former, but tried to negotiate as favourable terms as possible. Chodkiewicz returned to the Lublin Sejm, and on 28 June 1569, agreed to the idea of a union and even a single state seal – in other words, the incorporation of Lithuania into Poland. This was a brutal compromise. In



Mid-18th century map of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, showing borders of the GDL. Royal Castle in Warsaw.

addressing Sigismund Augustus, he stated: "Bowing to Your Majesty's will, we were forced to yield here with the deepest pain and sorrow. There are no words for our grief. For we, as loyal sons of our motherland, are obliged to look after her welfare as much as we are able. If we are unable to defend her now, it is because we are forced to concede to obstacles, fate and time."

After these words, the Lithuanians fell to their knees weeping before the king. This even brought the Poles to tears. It seems that Chodkiewicz's

tears were also an expression of diplomacy. By playing with ambiguities during the negotiation process, the Elder of Samogitia managed to narrow the question of the union down to the matter of seals: whether the king's documents would be stamped only with the Polish seal (which would mean that Lithuania had been annexed and at best had become an autonomous province of Poland), or with the Lithuanian seals as well. As if agreeing with the Polish opinion that there should be one common seal, he concurrently asked that the seals of Lithuania not be annulled. This was an obvious contradiction. By protecting the seals of the GDL, Chodkiewicz succeeded in ensuring that specific issues concerning Polish- Lithuanian relations and even the formation of a union be settled not at the Lublin Sejm, but later, which thereby left open the possibility of preserving Lithuanian statehood. And this was done by demanding that later kings recognize the seals of Lithuania. Thus, Chodkiewicz found a loophole, even where it seemed that there was no way out.

Of course, the Poles and Sigismund Augustus pressured the Lithuanians during the negotiations preceding the Union of Lublin: they sought to abolish Lithuanian statehood and to tear away its lands. But even the compromise of the Union of Lublin was an outcome which the representatives of the GDL accepted only with tears. The validity of this compromise was not questioned seriously for two centuries to come. The benefits of the Union of Lublin became evident soon. When Prince Stephen Báthory of Transylvania became the ruler of Poland and Lithuania (reigned 1576–1586), a decisive victory was achieved in the Livonian War against Muscovy, and the threat of this enemy was removed for over half a century (Poland and Lithuania even occupied Moscow in 1609–1611). The most important outcome of the compromise of the Union of Lublin, however, was the Commonwealth of Two Nations, which existed for two more centuries. And it did not simply exist – it also gave Europe bread, tolerance, nobiliary democracy, baroque art, and a constitution.

The GDL in Baroque Europe: Nobiliary Democracy

Where did the grandeur of Italy, the paragon of Renaissance civilization, disappear during the 17th and 18th centuries? After the great discoveries of the Age of Exploration (early 15th to the 18th century) and

Turkish expansion, the Mediterranean Sea lost its economic importance. And what happened to Portugal and Spain, the pioneers of exploration? From a geopolitical point of view, the latter had no peer in Europe in the 16th century – the sun never set on the possessions of Spain. One reason that the dominance of Spain and Portugal waned was that the gold shipped in from Latin America ensured an easy life without effort; their wealth did not encourage them to develop their own cities and towns and their economies. The decline of Spain's power was marked by the defeat of the Invincible Armada in 1588.

During the 17th and 18th centuries, old Western Europe differentiated into the Catholic South and the Protestant North. Catholicism was a precondition for the spread of Italian and Spanish baroque culture to other Catholic countries of Western Europe, such as France, Bavaria, and Flanders, and particularly to the estates of the monarchs and aristocrats of those countries. (One of the best known baroque-era painters, Peter Paul Rubens, grew up in Flanders).

Protestantism was the reason that Northern Europe (Scandinavia), a peripheral region of Europe during the Middle Ages, progressed dynamically with Western Europe (Holland, England), and surpassed Catholic Central Europe during the 17th and 18th centuries. Catholic Central Europe, made up of weaker cities and a lesser need for literacy compared to Protestantism, nestled up to southern Western Europe (Italy, Spain, Portugal), which professed Catholicism. In the 16th and 17th centuries, this choice did not seem a bad option – Rome, Madrid and Lisbon still shined the light of Catholicism and baroque architecture and art as far as Mexico and Paraguay. The other edge of this Catholic world, its northernmost outpost, was Lithuania.

The beginning of the Baroque Age in Lithuania can be linked not only to the Union of Lublin, but also to the Jesuits, who came to Lithuania in 1569 and founded Vilnius University in 1579. Construction of the baroque church at the Jesuit college in Nesvizh began in 1586, though Vilnius' Church of St Casimir is usually considered the paragon of baroque architecture. Baroque art, the Jesuits, and Vilnius University were the most important cultural features of this age. Various ties linked them to the nobility, whose power and influence as a class increased significantly after the land reform of 1557 (Lith. *valakų reforma*), which introduced the Western three-field farming system but also essentially institutionalized serfdom.

The influence of the nobility was also enhanced when their status was formalized in the *Second Lithuanian Statute* in 1566. Thus the broad-brush terms "baroque order" and "baroque economy" are warranted.

Baroque was slowly replaced by neoclassicism, although this style only began to flourish at the very end of the 18th century. Antoni Tyzenhaus's reforms (1767), Paweł Ksawery Brzostowski's Pavlov (Paulava) Republic (1769), the suppression of the Jesuits and the creation of the Commission of National Education (1773) are all sometimes considered to be the beginning of the Age of Enlightenment.

The Baroque Age flourished in Lithuania during the period after the Union of Lublin. The official name of the joint state was the Commonwealth of Two Nations, but it is frequently referred to as the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth (PLC). The name suggests that this was a union of two equal states. In reality, however, Poland was dominant. The highest government institution (besides the king) was the joint Sejm (Parliament), which consisted of two chambers, the Senate and the Chamber of Envoys (or Deputies). The Sejm elected the king. Lithuania held only one third of the seats in the Sejm because it was equated with a single Polish province. In Poland, there were two provinces: Greater Poland, with its major city Poznan; and Lesser Poland, with its capital of Kraków.

The GDL maintained its own name and territory. It also had a separate executive government, including a chancellor, treasurer and hetman, as well as a separate treasury, army, court and legal system, which was made official by the *Third Statute of Lithuania* in 1588. It was only in the second half of the 18th century that joint executive institutions or offices began to appear. The PLC was thus not a unitary state, but rather, a federal one, in which only the highest state institutions – the sovereign and the Sejm – were common. In drawing up the Union of Lublin, moreover, Lithuanian diplomats had succeeded in preserving the Great Seal of Lithuania, without which decisions made by the Polish king would not be valid in Lithuania. Furthermore, before attending the joint Sejm, Lithuanian representatives would hold their own "parliamentary sessions" to discuss a common position. In time, the rule of *liberum veto*, which necessitated a unanimous vote for proposals to become law, took effect in the PLC Sejm, so there was no way the joint parliament could impose its will on Lithuania. The Poles wanted a unitary state, but got a federal union in theory and a confederation with a common foreign policy in reality.

Interior of the Church of Sts Peter and Paul in Vilnius, one of the most majestic and ornate baroque masterpieces of the PLC (second half of the 17th century). Photograph by Arūnas Baltėnas.

The gradual assimilation of the LDK elite into Polish culture, however, changed the legal and political situation. Although Ruthenian, Latin and Lithuanian linguistic models of culture existed, the Polish one, furthered by the processes of integration in public life, became more and more widespread. Perhaps the most significant starting point for the eventual dominance of the Polish model was the publication in Polish in 1582 of Maciej Stryjkowski's *Chronicle of Poland, Lithuania, Samogitia and all of Rus'*. This book became a handbook for the Lithuanian nobility.

The Polonization of Lithuania is one of the most important phenomena of the baroque era. Not only was the Polish language adopted by the nobility, but the Polish culture and lifestyle as well. This is why the culture of Lithuania at that time was sometimes called "a second iteration of Polish culture." Similar analogies would be the "iterations" of English culture in

Ireland (not to mention the ones in the United States or Australia), of Danish culture in Norway, of French culture in Québec, and of Spanish culture in Mexico and Argentina.

The *Statutes* of Lithuania defined and legalized the status of the nobility. The nobility was the only class possessing political rights and the privilege of sending their elected deputies to the Sejm. Since these deputies also elected the monarch, the system was more similar to a republic than a monarchy. Indeed, *Rzeczpospolita* (republic, commonwealth) was part of its official name. This meant that the political system of the PLC resembled others emerging in the early modern period in Europe, such as that of the Dutch, who began to create a republic in the second half of the 16th century, and preceded England's constitutional monarchy, which was established in 1689.

The fact that the political system of the PLC was based on the nobility, who comprised just seven percent of the population, however, shows its class-based nature. The monarch, though elected by the "nation" of nobles, received his sovereign power from God. Thus, Lithuania's "nobiliary democracy" from 1566–1795 was a class monarchy, comparable to the 13th–15th century systems of government in England and France. Unfortunately, there was more anarchy than order in this political system. Contemporaries even used to say that "the state is based on disorder". The rule of *liberum veto,* which was exercised in the PLC Sejm, gave each member of the parliament the right to veto any decision and thereby paralyze proceedings. From 1573 until 1763, fifty-three of one hundred thirty-seven sessions of the Sejm were dissolved without reaching a decision on any measure, often because individual deputies exercised their power of veto.

In Western class monarchies, the townspeople – the burgher class – acted as a counterbalance to the nobility, but in Poland-Lithuania the weakness of the towns turned the political system into anarchy, or, more concretely, feudal decentralization or disunion. Because the burghers were weak as a class, the nobility in the PLC was able to concentrate its powers and prevent absolutism from emerging. Absolutism would have diminished the powers of the nobility and therefore reduced their class domination.

The *Statutes* of Lithuania and two of their initiators, Albertas Goštautas and Lew Sapieha, have long been a source of Lithuanian pride because these codes are far more comprehensive than the legal codes of other Central European countries in early modern Europe. Only the nobility, howev-

er, enjoyed political rights (though even in the constitutional and modern Great Britain of the 19th century, the percentage of citizens enjoying such rights was not any larger). Needless to say, there was no shortage of selfishness among the nobility, but at least initially there was a political culture of consensus decision-making, which occasionally allowed the nobles to dig into their own pockets and tax themselves when the need arose. This political culture slowly died out as the 18th century progressed, but without recognizing that it existed, it would be impossible to explain the reforms that the nobles enacted.

Multiconfessionalism and Tolerance in Poland and Lithuania

Historians have described Poland's religious tolerance during the 16th and 17th centuries as having no analogue in Europe, and Poland as the continent's greatest harbour of tolerance. Multiculturalism and multiconfessionalism are sometimes considered to be Poland's greatest contribution to European culture. From 1387, the GDL was a Catholic state, like Poland, yet around the year 1500, there were only three Orthodox dioceses in Poland, while the GDL had six, and all of them were subordinate to the same Ecumenical Patriarchate in Kiev, whose metropolitan used to reside not only in Kiev, but in Navahrudak and Vilnius as well. Thus, Poland's Orthodox believers were ruled from the GDL, and the fact that more Orthodox believers lived in the GDL than in Poland made the former the logical place to try to unite the Catholic and Orthodox churches. Numerous such attempts at church union were made during the 15th and 16th centuries. Eventually they led to the Union of Brest in 1596. After the Union of Brest, the majority of Orthodox believers in Poland and Lithuania converted to the Greek Catholic Church. However, the metropolitans of the Greek Catholic Church were again the Kiev metropolitans, only now they took up permanent residence in Vilnius. Thus both Orthodox and Greek Catholic churches played a more important role in the GDL than they did in Poland.

Lutheranism, which began in 1539, was the first branch of the Protestant Reformation to reach Lithuania. Later it became more and more linked with the Germans, so the Lutheran communities in the GDL began to be referred to as "German communities". Thus Lutheranism was

less prevalent in Lithuania than it was in Poland, where there were more German settlers. However, the Evangelical Reformed Church, which followed Calvinist teachings, flourished in Lithuania and was considerably stronger than its counterpart in Poland. Many prominent nobles of the GDL became supporters of the Evangelical Reformed faith. Almost all of the Catholic nobles, as well as some of the Orthodox ones, adopted Calvinism and converted nearly half of Catholic churches into Protestant ones.

Other Christian and non-Christian confessions had resided in the GDL since the 14th century. There were the Armenian Catholic and Jewish minority communities, which had migrated to the GDL from Poland, or perhaps Hungary, and at first were small. Yet by the 17th and 18th centuries, the Jewish community in Vilnius began to surpass such established Jewish cultural centres as Kraków, Lublin, and Lvov, and Vilnius began to be referred to as the "Jerusalem of Lithuania". Although the roles of the Jews, and especially of the Armenians, was less pronounced in the GDL than in Poland, the latter could not boast of such distinctive communities as the Muslim Tartars and Karaites, which Grand Duke Vytautas had settled in the GDL. Perhaps the best-known member of the GDL Karaite community was Isaac ben Abraham of Troki (1525–1586), who is often mentioned by tolerance researchers. Poland also had no Old Believers, who had split from the Russian Orthodox Church because of differences over liturgy and were persecuted in Russia; they migrated to the GDL in the second half of the 17th century. Cultural diversity in the GDL was increased even more by the ethnic aspect: though faith and ethnicity often coincided (Jews, Tatars, Karaites, and, in part, Old Believers), religious confessions often encompassed various ethnic communities.

Until its union with Poland, the GDL surpassed the former in its cultural and confessional diversity, and the joint state broadened Poland's diversity by adding such minorities as the Muslim Tartars, which Poland had never had previously. With ten different confessions, the GDL had no peer in this respect in the 16th century, even in comparison with such diverse countries as Poland and Transylvania. The GDL stood out in the Central and Eastern European region for the rapidity with which it gave legal sanction to multiconfessionalism. In Poland, this only happened after the Union of Lublin. The Warsaw Confederation of 1573 extended religious freedom to the nobility and free persons within the PLC. The same was done earlier in Lithuania in 1563, by a privilege of Sigismund Augustus that granted equal

rights to all Christians, regardless of denomination. This became law in both the *Second* and *Third Statutes of Lithuania*. The *First Statute of Lithuania* (1529) was promulgated before the Protestant Reformation and so referred only to the Catholic and Orthodox nobility. Although the equality guaranteed by law did not directly touch upon non-Christian faiths (those of the Jews, Karaites, and Muslim Tartars), their ethnic communities and religions were tolerated as early as the late 14th century. The boundaries of tolerance later narrowed in both Poland and Lithuania, but changes took place slowly and without compulsion, and multiconfessionalism survived right up to the 20th century. The situation in Western Europe in the 16th century is characterized by the St Bartholomew's Day Massacre in Paris (1572), which became a symbol of religious intolerance in European history. Thus the case can be made that Lithuania in the 16th century was the birthplace of European tolerance.

Nations, Languages, and Writing

The need for written Lithuanian arose in the wake of the Reformation. First and foremost, this was the cultural programme of the Protestant scholar and educator Abraomas Kulvietis (ca 1510–1545), who was one of the first authors to write in Lithuanian, and of the Lutheran priest and author of the first Lithuanian book (1547) Martynas Mažvydas (ca 1510/20–1563), who briefly studied at Kulvietis's school in Vilnius. They both were forced to leave the GDL because of their religious views and their Lithuanian writings were published in Prussia under the aegis of the Duke of Prussia. Their efforts to promote the Lithuanian written word was neither appreciated nor needed by the GDL elite.

In 1595, Mikalojus Daukša published the first book in Lithuanian – the Lithuanian translation of Jacob Ledesma's *Catechism*. In 1599, he published another Lithuanian book, the *Postilla Catholicka*. In the preface he addressed Lithuanians at large, urging them to develop written Lithuanian: "Where in the world, I say, is there a nation so base and despicable that it does not have these three seemingly innate things of its own: the land of their fathers, their customs and language?" For "it is in this [their own] language that laws are usually written, in which their own histories and those of other nations, old and new, are published, in which affairs of state are discussed, and which is used nicely and decently in everyday life

Segment of a map with the first lines of the Lord's Prayer in all of the European languages (Lithuanian circled in red). Nuremberg, 1741.

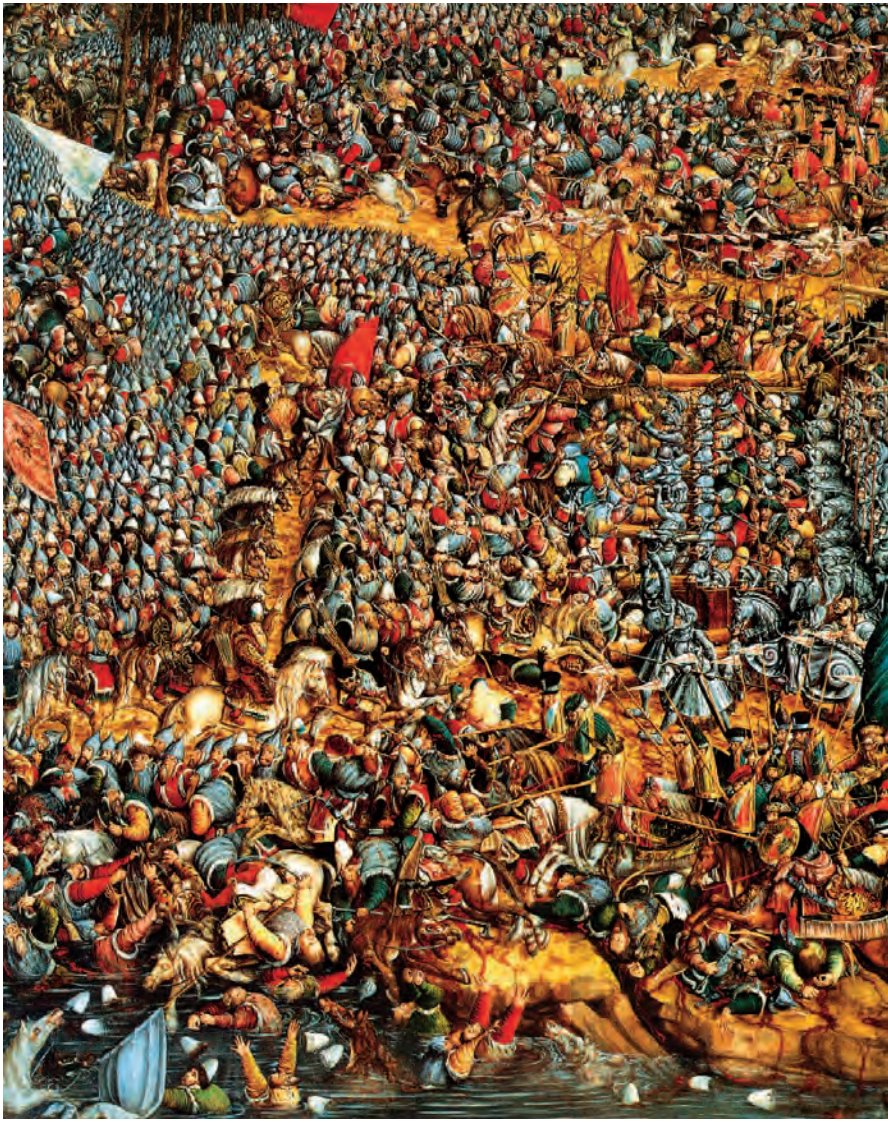
at church, at work and at home." Clearly it was not simply the everyday use of the Lithuanian language that Daukša cared about, but also making it the language of the country at every level. Daukša's unique undertakings were called a "cry in the wilderness" because his successors did not raise such goals.

The publication of Lithuanian books continued, albeit sporadically, throughout the entire Baroque Age. They were significantly fewer in number than books in Polish or Latin. The title of Konstantinas Sirvydas's *Dictionarium trium linguarum* (Dictionary of Three Languages, 1620) is indic-

The Polish-Lithuanian army defeating the Turks at the Battle of Khotyn, 1673 (from Jakób Bennet's *Power of the Right Hand of the Lord*, Vilnius, 1674).

ative of language priorities. Intended for young scholars, Polish words are explained in Latin, and only then in Lithuanian. Sirvydas's Lithuanian sermons (*Punktai Sakymų*, 1629), hymnal (Solomon Slawoczynski's *Giesmės*, 1646), and grammar (*Universitas Lingvarum Litvaniae*, 1737) were meant only for everyday use at church and school. Daukša's vision of Lithuanian as the primary language in all spheres of life was never realized. Progress required expanding the Lithuanian vocabulary, but rather than creating new words, Polish words were appropriated instead. Thus, unable to produce neologisms to suit the changing needs of daily life, Lithuanian was first dominated by the Ruthenian language, and later by Polish. Polish became the integrative language of the GDL nobility and the means for disseminating Western culture in the Ruthenian lands.

Although attempts to write in Latin, and even Lithuanian, continued in Lithuania, the process of Polonization gradually embraced the whole of its political and cultural elite. The role of the Polish language in Lithuanian culture was summed up by one of the Radziwiłłs in a letter that he wrote



Under the command of Hetman Konstanty Ostrogski, Lithuanian and Polish troops defeated the Muscovite army on 8 September 1514 in a battle near Orsha. 16th-century painting attributed to Hans Krell, now in the National Museum in Warsaw.

in 1615: "Though I was born a Lithuanian and will die a Lithuanian, we have to use the Polish language in our homeland." Little by little, the Polish language became entrenched. In 1697, at the request of Lithuanian nobles, the Sejm granted it the status of official written language of the GDL in place of the previously used Ruthenian. Thus the Polish language was legitimized at the request of the Lithuanian nobles themselves. It was a choice made by Lithuanian society, and not forced on Lithuania by Poland. The development of the Lithuanian written language naturally stagnated.

In the 17th and 18th centuries, a common consciousness of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth as synonymous with Poland was forming. Nonetheless, within this Poland there was still a distinct "other Poland", which maintained a Lithuanian identity. Even in these late centuries, the idea of a "political nation" of the GDL still existed. This is confirmed by complex formulations of dual identity. For example: "*natione Lithuanus, gente Polonus*" (Lithuanian nationality, Polish ethnicity) or "Ліцвіны грэцкага закону людзі" (Lithuanians of the Greek faith) or "Ліцвіны рус'кага рода" (Lithuanians of Ruthenian origin). A common political life, a common parliament (Sejm) and local parliaments (Sejmiki), and the body of law codified in the *Statutes of Lithuania* (1529, 1566, 1588) resulted in the understanding that a Lithuanian is not a person who speaks Lithuanian, but one who defends freedom and abides by the *Statutes of Lithuania*. The preconditions for the nobility of the GDL to identify themselves as a political nation were created by the military victories at Grunwald, Kletsk, Orsha, Kircholm, and Khotyn, where Lithuanians fought shoulder to shoulder with the Ruthenians.

Of the most influential families of the 16th century, only the Goštautas (Gasztołd) and Radziwiłł families were of Lithuanian descent; all of the others – the Chodkiewicz, Sapieha, Wołłowicz, Tyszkiewicz and Ogiński families, among others, were all Ruthenians, though they considered themselves to be citizens of the GDL. Some families of Ruthenian descent, such as the Chodkiewiczes and the Sapiehas, even created legends about their Lithuanian origins. Thus the origin of the concept of Lithuania as a political nation can be traced to the 16th, or even the 15th century, when the Lithuanian nobility began to claim descent from the Romans. The legend of the arrival of Palemonas and his descendants from Rome to Lithuania that was created in the Lithuanian chronicles became the premise for both the Lithuanian and the Ruthenian nobility to draw their lineage from the

Painting by Vincas Smakauskas of Stephen Báthory founding Vilnius University, 1828.

legendary Palemonas or to find family ties to the real Gediminid dynasty. In this way the gentry of varied ethnicities formed a "Lithuanian" class of nobles with a common identity or consciousness. Ruthenian in origin, Greek Catholic in belief, Lithuanian in political identity, they spoke Polish.

Vilnius University

It is said that when cannons boom, the muses go silent. Yet during the Livonian War (1558–1583), Stephen Báthory concerned himself with creating a refuge for the muses – Vilnius University. There was a generally acknowledged need for an institution of higher learning in the GDL. The establishment of such an institution was stimulated by competition between the Protestant Reformation and the Counter-Reformation. Lithuanian Catholics, including Walerjan Protasewicz, Bishop of Vilnius, tried to pre-empt the Protestants in founding a college. Thus the Jesuits, who came to Vilnius in 1569 at the invitation of the bishop, received funding to found a college, with the ultimate goal of reorganizing it into a university.

Lithograph by Philippe Benoist and Adolphe Bayot of the Grand Courtyard of Vilnius University and the Church of the Sts John from Jan Kazimierz Wilczyński's *Album de Wilna*, 1850.

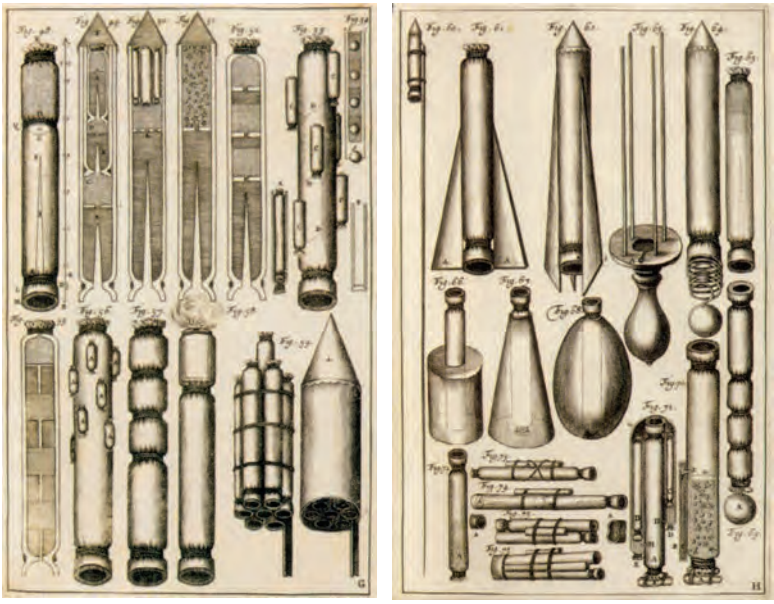
The college was officially opened on 17 July 1570. The Jesuits set ambitious goals for the future Vilnius University – to disseminate knowledge and Catholicism not only in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and its neighbouring lands, but also in Scandinavia and the Far East (including China!).

Reorganizing the college into a university required substantial funding and qualified professors, as well as papal consent (Pope Gregory XIII gave his approval in 1577). Yet the support of the sovereign was the most

Frontispiece of *Artis Magnae Artilleriae* by Kazimierz Siemienowicz, Amsterdam, 1650.

important thing. On 1 April 1579, King Stephen Báthory, in support of Bishop Walerjan Protasewicz's idea and efforts, issued an edict to open the Academy and University of Vilnius. On 29 October 1579, Pope Gregory XIII issued a papal bull that confirmed the reorganization of the Vilnius Jesuit College to a university. The new school was called *Academia et Universitas Vilnensis Societatis Iesu* – the Vilnius Academy and University of the Society of Jesus.

Right up until its closure in 1832, Vilnius University was not only the main institution of learning in Lithuania, but the principal cultural centre as well. The Jesuits, whose influence had determined the cultural content of the baroque era, disseminated their ideas through Vilnius University. The quality of studies at the old university is thought to have been as good as



Drawings of rockets from Kazimierz Siemienowicz's *Artis Magnae Artilleriae,* Amsterdam, 1650.

at the universities of Prague, Kraków, Vienna or Rome. Professors who came from these and other Western and Central European Catholic universities brought established teaching principles that had been influenced by the Catholic reformers of the Counter-Reformation, as well as strict requirements and a system of intensive education. The scholars of Vilnius spread their influence not just throughout Lithuania (primarily through the linguistic works of Konstantinas Sirvydas and Albertas Vijūkas-Kojalavičius), but far beyond the borders of ethnic Lithuania, throughout the multinational and multiconfessional GDL. The influence of the Jesuit Vilnius University was felt throughout Europe in the disciplines of theology, philosophy, logic, rhetoric and poetry. The works of Vilnius University professors even reached Protestant England. For example, Marcin Smiglecki's *Logica* (1618) was used as a textbook not only by professors at the Sorbonne but by those at Oxford as well, and the poetry of Maciej Kazimierz Sarbiewski, which was translated from Latin into English in 1646, was read at European universities instead of the usual works of Horace.

Vilnius University is one of the oldest universities in Central Europe. Only the universities of Prague, Kraków, Pécs, Óbuda and Königsberg are

older. In Vilnius, a university was founded just two hundred years after the Christianization of the state, while in the more advanced Bohemia it was founded 400 years after their conversion to Christianity. There is another aspect to the historical significance of Vilnius University. From the 14th century, the University of Kraków had been the easternmost university in Europe, but in the 16th century, Vilnius University took over this role and held it for the next two centuries (until the universities of Moscow and Saint Petersburg were founded). That this geographical position was not just a formality was already clear to the Jesuits who founded the university. One of them wrote: "It must not be forgotten that from here, the doors to Muscovy are wide open to us, and from there we can reach China via the Tartars. Sweden and Livonia should not be overlooked either." These ambitions do not seem so naive if we remember Vilnius University graduate Andrius Rudamina (1596–1631), who worked as a missionary in China from 1626 to 1631 and wrote texts on Catholic dogma and liturgy which were printed in Chinese. The greatest significance of the old Jesuit University was its position as the northernmost Catholic university and the easternmost European university.

The Easternmost and Northernmost Baroque Architecture in Europe

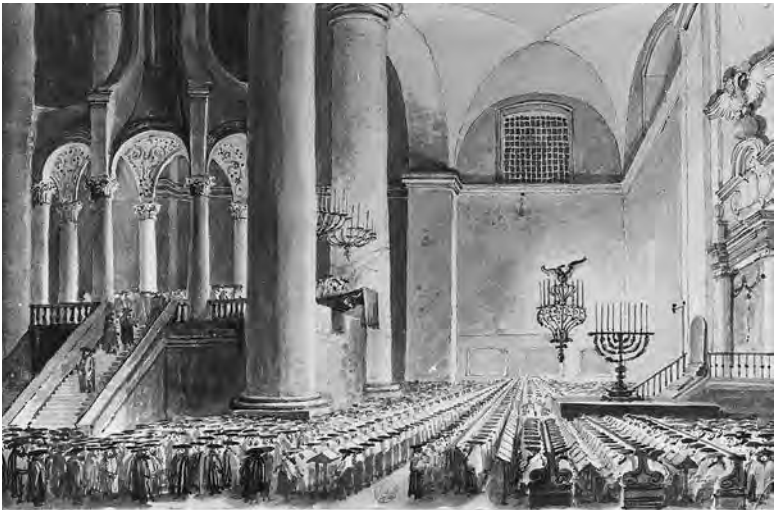
The concept of baroque style comes from the history of art and architecture, while the word itself is derived from the Spanish *barrueco* or the Portuguese *barroco*, both of which refer to an irregularly shaped pearl. In Lithuania, the baroque style is most visible in architecture, especially that of churches. It passed through several phases of development: from modest early baroque that was still influenced by the Renaissance to refined yet splendid late baroque and rococo; from the imitative stage to the very distinctive Vilnius baroque and provincial wooden baroque; and from art created for society's elite to the baroque creations of the people themselves. Baroque interiors made their way into brick churches of earlier styles. Baroque became a significant style of sculpture and painting. A new branch of art influenced by this style emerged – the theatre. Baroque spread to objects of everyday life – furniture, dishes, clothes, books. The baroque style influenced folk art: the wayside shrines with sculptures of the Pensive Christ, saints and the Pietà. A baroque landscape formed,

characterized by churches, monasteries, Stations of the Cross, chapels, wayside shrines, and crosses – a "holy landscape" which melded organically with the natural environment. Cross carving remains one of the most distinctive trademarks of Lithuanian folk art.

From the 1586 Jesuit church in Nesvizh to the sculptures that were created for the façade of the Vilnius Cathedral between 1784 and 1787, the baroque spirit was alive in Lithuania for two hundred years. Creations of European significance were built: St Casimir's Chapel at the Vilnius Cathedral, the Church of Sts Peter and Paul, and the Pažaislis Monastery near Kaunas. A distinct Vilnius school of baroque architecture formed in the first half of the 18th century. Its development is credited to Johann Christoph Glaubitz (ca 1700–1767), a Lutheran who had come from German lands, and who was the most productive 18th-century architect not just in Vilnius, but in the entire GDL. He fit into the multiconfessional city of Vilnius splendidly, and worked not only for Lutherans, but for Catholics, Greek Catholics, Orthodox, and Jews. Glaubitz developed a variety of baroque architecture that has no analogue – the Vilnius baroque school of architecture. The school is distinguished by its combination of decorative, compositional and architectural elements. The especially tall and slender towers that adorn the main façades of buildings are perhaps the school's most striking characteristic. Churches featuring two graceful towers with differently decorated sections became an integral feature of the Catholic landscape and marked the easternmost border of Catholicism as well as that of Central Europe. Glaubitz's thirty years of creativity (1737–1767) were a distinctive period of the old Lithuanian civilization, and testify to Lithuania's integral place in Western civilization. Johann Christoph Glaubitz's contributions to Lithuanian culture make him a significant and influential figure in the history of Lithuania.

The Gaon and "Jerusalem of the North"

Vilnius was made famous by the Vilna Gaon, Elijah ben Shlomo Zalman (1720–1797), one of the most illustrious figures in the history of world Jewry. His opposition to Hasidism, an influential reform movement among Jews, was largely responsible for stopping its spread in *Lita* (the Jewish term for Lithuania). Supporters of Hasidism, which originated in Ukraine (the southeastern part of the GDL) and spread all the way to



Painting of the interior of the Great Synagogue of Vilna by Franciszek Smuglewicz, 1786.

Vilnius, challenged traditional Rabbinic Judaism (Rabbinism) by placing more emphasis on ordinary people and their sincere faith, and by relaxing the stringent laws which regulated everyday life. It continued the tradition of Jewish mysticism. Hasidism was a more liberal and democratic branch of Judaism, but because it rejected the strict religious and moral standards of the traditional way of life, it was seen as a danger to the future of Judaism itself. The Vilna Gaon not only initiated resistance to Hasidism and declared its followers heretics, he also took measures and used his authority to stop the spread of Hasidism in Lithuania. Thus the dividing line between Rabbinism, which adhered to tradition, and Hasidism with its liberalizing reforms, ran right through the territory of the GDL. Although Hasidic Jews now account for about half of the world's Jewish population, the vitality of Orthodox Rabbinism illustrates how important tradition is to Jews. This also explains the authority of the Vilna Gaon.

At the urging of the Vilna Gaon, the teaching of Jewish theology at the *yeshivas* (religious educational institutions) was reorganized and the study of the Talmud in Yiddish was improved. He produced works in nearly all of the fields of Jewish studies at the time – from commentaries on the Holy Scriptures to Hebrew grammar and biblical geography. The Gaon's greatest achievement was his glosses on the Babylonian Talmud.

The Vilna Gaon's authority seems to have been the deciding factor in earning Lithuanian Jews, the Litvaks, a reputation as exalted Jews, standing out from the rest by their strict observance of religious tradition, intellectual rationality and respect for education. Rumours that all of the sages of Vilnius knew all 64 volumes of the Talmud by heart were not without basis. Furthermore, the Talmud was studied in Litvish Yiddish – a dialect of Yiddish that formed in Lithuania. It was namely the Litvish dialect that eventually became the basis for modern Standard Yiddish. The term Litvak today references the place of origin, i.e., a Jew from Lithuania (meaning historical Lithuania – the GDL after the Union of Lublin). However, the term was also applied to Jews who followed the distinctive style of life that continued even after the destruction of the GDL.

Vilnius became a symbol of the stability and cultural richness of Jewish life in the 18th century, and was thus called the Jerusalem of Lithuania (*Jerusolajim d'Lita*). Scholarship today considers late 18th- and early 19th-century Vilnius to be among the top ten centres of Jewish world culture (alongside Amsterdam, London, Warsaw, Lvov, Thessaloniki, Istanbul, Tunis and Baghdad).

THE EARLIEST CONSTITUTION IN EUROPE AND ITS REPEAL

After the accession of Stanislaw August Poniatowski to the throne of the PLC, Russia increasingly interfered in Lithuanian and Polish affairs. Poniatowski had been the lover of Catherine the Great of Russia, and Russian support had been influential in bringing him to the throne. The Russian ambassador in Warsaw seemed to be dictating to the king, and this led some patriotic gentry to organize resistance to his rule. They organized the Confederation of Bar to oppose Russian influence, and were successful for a time, but were finally crushed by the Russian army. During the fighting, Prussian and Austrian troops had also entered Poland, and when the resistance was quashed, the three powerful neighbours concluded a treaty and all three annexed various Lithuanian and Polish territories. This was the First Partition of the Commonwealth in 1772.

This partition, together with the spread of Enlightenment ideas, led to reforms that were meant to strengthen the state by reforming the system of nobiliary democracy. Political realities clearly demonstrated that the sys-

tem was inadequate for the times. As a result of these reform efforts, the Great Sejm of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth adopted the Constitution of 3 May 1791. The Constitution changed the government from an elective to a hereditary monarchy, but the king remained a figurehead, the expresser of the will of the nation.

The draft of the Constitution of May 3 was modelled after the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen adopted in France during the French Revolution (1789), which clearly influenced the Polish and Lithuanian reformers. In the summer of 1791, after the Constitution of 3 May had been ratified, the last monarch of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, Stanisław August Poniatowski, wrote to the French Constituent Assembly that, beside France, "there is one more nation in Europe". Eloquent words in the midst of absolutist empires. The form of government created by the Polish-Lithuanian Constitution paralleled the one introduced in England a hundred years earlier; the latter, however, was never formalized in a written constitution. The world's first constitution was adopted in the United States, first as the Articles of Confederation and Perpetual Union (1781) and then as the Constitution of the United States (ratified 1788). Thus, the Constitution of the PLC was the second in the world and the first in Europe, preceding the Constitution of France by a few months.

To this day, the world and even some Lithuanians consider this constitution to be the Constitution of Poland alone, even though Lithuanian deputies succeeded in amending it by negotiating the 20 October 1791 Reciprocal Guarantee of Two Nations – the crucial addendum to the Constitution which guaranteed Lithuania equal representation in governing bodies.

The Enlightenment Comes to the GDL

Conflicts over territory led to continual wars between the PLC and the Turks, and the PLC and the Grand Duchy of Moscow (later Russia). The PLC's attempts to establish a foothold on the Baltic Sea and consolidate its positions in Livonia created additional conflicts with Russia as well as with Sweden, whose military power had grown in the 17th century. In the Livonian War of 1558–1583, Lithuania and Poland captured the greater part of Livonia, along with Riga. Sweden, however, began to seek dominion over the Baltic Sea (*dominium maris Baltici*). Sweden's ambitions challenged the interests not only of the PLC but also of Russia.

Painting by Pieter Snayers of the Battle of Kircholm (1605), not far from Riga, in which the army of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania (left), under the command of Jan Karol Chodkiewicz, defeated 12,000 Swedish troops with just 3,000 cavalry, ca 1620.

In the 17th century, the PLC fought two wars with Sweden: 1600–1629 and 1655–1660. These wars were complicated by the fact that the kings of the PLC at this time were from the Swedish House of Vasa and laid claim to the Swedish throne as well. The fight for Livonia was mainly in Lithuania's interest because it did not have a large port, while Poland had Gdansk. In 1605, the Lithuanian army achieved a decisive victory against the Swedes in the Battle of Kircholm, but eventually Sweden captured Riga and took control of the Baltic coast.

From 1655 to 1660, battles with the Swedes were fought on the territories of Poland and Lithuania. In an attempt to end this war and concentrate their military forces on the wars with Muscovy (1654–1667), where they were suffering defeats, in 1655 Lithuanian magnates signed the Treaty of Kėdainiai, naming Sweden's King Charles X the Grand Duke of Lithuania and thus formally breaking off the country's union with Poland. However, this "Union of Kėdainiai" with Sweden never went into effect. The Swedes entered into it in order to strengthen their military position vis-à-vis the Russians but they were unsuccessful. During the Great Northern War (1700–1721), Russia destroyed the army of King Charles XII of Sweden, occupied all of Livonia, and took control of the Baltic coast from Vyborg to Riga. During these wars, Lithuania and Poland weakened economically and politically. Their territory was devastated by foreign armies as well as their own. There were manifestations of anarchy in parts of the country and rivalries among magnates emerged. The Swedes destroyed Lithuania's small ports in Palanga and Šventoji. The battles against the Swedes left a deep mark in the memory of the Lithuanian people, as evidenced by various legends and stories about the Swedes, about the *švedkapiai* (Swedish burial grounds), and about the Swedish presence in Lithuania.

Poland and Lithuania were threatened not only by the rising power of Russia under Peter the Great, but also by Prussia, which had become a kingdom in 1701. These states would eventually determine the fate of the PLC.

After the fall of the Saxon Dynasty, Stanisław August Poniatowski was elected sovereign of the PLC in 1764. Although he was not one of those rulers who determine the course of history, it was precisely his reign (1764–1795) that became an historical epoch – an epoch of attempted changes and reforms, of the decline of baroque, and of the agony and destruction of the state.

Painting by Franciszek Smuglewicz of Lithuanian peasants, 1800.

During this period, two events significant for Lithuanian culture occurred at almost the same time: in 1759, the first Lithuanian-language primer was published, and in 1760, Lithuania's first newspapers – *Kurier Litewski* and *Wiadomości Literackie* – began publishing in Polish.

The most significant event, however, was the establishment of the Commission of National Education, with Bishop of Vilnius Ignacy Massalski as chairman, in 1773. The Commission was formed to reorganize the schools in Poland and Lithuania after the suppression of the Jesuit Order that same year. It was the first equivalent of a Ministry of Education in Europe. The Commission began its reforms with the goal of creating an integrated system of education. The state was divided into the educational provinces of Poland and Lithuania, and these provinces, into districts. There were four educational districts in Lithuania and six in Poland. Responsibility for the Lithuanian province was entrusted to the reformed Vilnius University, renamed the Principal School of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania.

Lithograph by Isidore Laurent Deroy, according to Vasilij Sadovnikov, of the Vilnius cathedral from Jan Kazimierz Wilczyński's *Album de Wilna*, 1847.

The Commission of National Education modernized and secularized the school curriculum. It introduced compulsory writing and mathematics as well as history and geography, began to combine elements of general education with the development of practical agricultural and trade skills, and introduced the study of natural and physical sciences. Essential changes were made in the curriculum of Vilnius University as well. The study of physics, biology and medicine were introduced, and astronomy became a separate field of study. Although Lithuanian was only taught in elementary school, and secondary schools and universities switched from Latin to Polish, the new educational system nevertheless tore down class barriers.

The political changes occurring at this time and the beginnings of the Enlightenment in the GDL coincided with the start of reforms initiated by Antoni Tyzenhauz that brought significant changes to the Lithuanian economy. Appointed treasurer of the royal court and administrator of royal estates by Stanisław August Poniatowski in 1765, he increased royal profits threefold not only through agricultural innovations like land reclamation, valuation based on quality of soil, and introduction of new breeds, but also by undertaking a wide range of public works. Tyzenhauz also sent young people to England to study agronomy, and founded special vocational

schools in Grodno to prepare surveyors, accountants, engineers, veterinarians, physicians, and even ballet dancers for his theatre. He set up textile, paper, haberdashery, weapon and carriage factories on the royal estate of Grodno, importing necessary equipment from abroad. Tyzenhauz's progressive reforms were some of the most important events in Lithuanian life at the end of the 18th century. Unfortunately, in implementing his reforms, he also significantly increased the exploitation of serfs through expanded use of forced labour on the estates and new obligations like building roads, bridges and dams. The added burdens resulted in a serf revolt in 1769 on the royal estate in Šiauliai.

But while serfdom was becoming increasingly oppressive on the royal estates as a result of Tyzenhauz's reforms, Enlightenment ideas influenced some to grant serfs their personal freedom, and at least one landowner to abolish serfdom in his domains. The Pavlov Republic established by Paweł Ksawery Brzostowski on the estate of Merkinė along the Merkis River (around 30 km southeast of Vilnius) is regarded as the most vivid example of such Enlightenment thinking. He freed his serfs in 1769, rented them land, and gave them self-rule. The Four-Year Sejm approved the Republic's statutes in 1791, thereby showing its goodwill towards such an "experiment", which was being used to introduce a lifestyle befitting a republic. The experiment lasted from 1769 until 1795. At the time, it was said that there were three republics in the Commonwealth: Poland, Lithuania, and Pavlov. This illustrates the great importance that the public attached to Pavlov's Republic. Such an experiment was unprecedented in Central Europe. It was one of the most radical peasant reforms in the PLC during the second half of the 18th century.

Neoclassicism is the revival of the styles and spirit of classical antiquity, and once established in style-setting France, it was widely copied in other European countries. In Lithuania it coincided with the historical processes initiated during the Age of Enlightenment. In 1769, Marcin Knackfus (ca 1740–1821), one of the pioneers of neoclassical architecture in Lithuania, became architect to the Bishop of Vilnius Ignacy Massalski – the future chairman of the Commission of National Education – and began to build the episcopal palace in Verkiai, which is now considered to be one of the most distinctive monuments of neoclassicism in Lithuania. The same year, one of the towers of the Vilnius cathedral collapsed, and the Vilnius Town Hall tower began to lean. Thus life itself afforded the opportunity for neo-

classicism to become the most prominent style of architecture in Vilnius. Laurynas Gucevičius (1753–1798), Lithuania's most notable neoclassical architect, began reconstruction of the Vilnius cathedral in 1782 and of the Vilnius town hall in 1786. Even though the sculptures and tympanum for the main façade of the cathedral were still being created in baroque style, the neoclassical portico – the symbol of Lithuanian neoclassicism – was built in 1786. The three statues on the pediment – St Stanislaus (Poland's patron saint), St Helena, and St Casimir (Lithuania's patron saint) – were completed in 1792.

Reconstruction of the Vilnius cathedral and town hall coincided with the time of political change subsequent to the Four-Year Sejm. Gucevičius himself would rise in defence of the Constitution of May 3 when the need arose, becoming the head of the Vilnius Guard during Kościuszko's Uprising. In Gucevičius's person the ideas of the Enlightenment and neoclassicism merged; he was one of the most prominent artists in the history of Lithuania who bound his fate to that of his country.

The Constitution of May 3 and the Reciprocal Guarantee of the Two Nations

The Four-Year Sejm, which commenced in 1788, adopted the Constitution of May 3 in 1791. Prior to that, the Sejm had undertaken very important social reforms – for the first time, there were attempts to give townspeople (burghers) nearly equal rights to that of the gentry, or at least to begin this process. It was the Constitution of May 3 that formalized burgher rights. The Constitution also mentioned for the first time that the state would protect peasants in their dealings with landowners. Thus, the term "nation" used in the Constitution no longer meant just the "nation of nobles", but rather nobles, townspeople and peasants equally. In the Constitution, the political system of the state was based on Charles de Montesquieu's theory of separation of powers. Laws were to be issued by the Sejm. The *liberum veto* – the right of the nobles to protest parliamentary resolutions and nullify its work – was repealed. Although the king was to chair the Sejm, his legislative powers were limited, though his role in the executive branch was increased. The system of royal elections, which had pushed Poland and Lithuania into a quagmire of anarchy, was revoked

Adoption of the Constitution of 3 May 1791. Painting by Kazimierz Wojniakowski (based on a drawing by Jean-Pierre Norblin), 1806.

and the state was declared a hereditary monarchy. The Government, called the Guardians of Rights, which in addition to the king included the chairs (ministers) of the newly created Polish-Lithuanian central institutions of state power – the commissions of the treasury, the military, and the police – was to help the sovereign manage the affairs of state. The Constitution concluded with the idea that the people were the guarantors of the continuity and sovereignty of the state. Not the monarch with his army, but every citizen of the country was obliged to defend its freedom. Thus the PLC acquired a fundamental law that accorded with the enlightened spirit of the times and the principles of civil society. A constitutional monarchy was created.

There is doubt sometimes that the Constitution of May 3 was also the governing law of Lithuania. This is odd, as it was not just the reform of Poland that was carried out. The Constitution uses the plural – "states of the Commonwealth"– meaning Lithuania as well. In spite of all the unitarist tendencies, Articles III and IV of the Constitution clearly refer to the "states of the Commonwealth" – Poland and Lithuania. There are references not only to common rulers, but also to the Lithuanian Grand Duke Vytautas and the privileges he granted to Lithuanian nobles.

In discussions following the adoption of the Constitution of May 3, Lithuanian representatives expressed their belief that the Constitution was their concession in the name of strengthening the state (30 of 50 GDL Sejm deputies voted in favour of the Constitution).

On 16 May, a law was passed requiring that every third Sejm convene in Grodno and separate sessions be held for Lithuanian deputies, and on 24 June, the earlier names of the states – the Crown and the GDL – were returned. The name Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth appeared in the names of the commissions, and codification work regarding the Constitution took place separately. The position of the Lithuanian representatives was that the GDL must remain a separate political entity with its own laws, and that the *Lithuanian Statute* must be preserved as the basis of GDL identity.

On 20 October 1791, the Lithuanian delegation at the Four-Year Sejm succeeded in having their demand met to add an amendment to the Constitution, which was called the Reciprocal Guarantee of Two Nations. The amendment was presented to the Sejm by Kazimierz Nestor Sapieha, and was most likely authored by the Vilnius district judge Tadeusz Korsak. According to the Guarantee, the main institutions of executive power established by the Constitution of May 3 – the military and treasury commissions – were to have equal numbers of Polish and GDL officials, and were to be presided over by Polish and Lithuanian officials on an alternating basis. Though a "common Homeland – the Republic of Poland" is referred to in the Guarantee, there are also mentions of "both nations" and the GDL. Thus the Constitution retained the principle of dualism – a federal state. Nevertheless, the authors of the addendum and their contemporaries admitted that this was just a continuation of the Union of Lublin adapted to the new needs of society. The equal composition of the military and treasury commissions even surpassed the principles of the Union of Lublin, as "neither in [the number of] its inhabitants nor its wealth does Lithuania make up even a third of the Crown" (Hugo Kołłątaj). In terms of the legal system of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, the Guarantee became a part of the *pacta conventa* – the obligations of the kings-elect to the nobility of the PLC that were agreed upon in 1573. This meant that the future rulers of the PLC and their successors would also have to abide by this Guarantee. Thus, the Guarantee even rose above the Constitution of May 3 in the hierarchy of legal regulations. It could not be changed even

Allegory of the Partition of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. Engraving by Johannes Esaias Nilson, 1773. National Museum of Lithuania.

by the extraordinary Sejms, which had the right to make revisions to the constitution every 25 years.

For this reason, the Constitution of May 3 was seen as a document laying the basis for the revival of Lithuania. The "Glorious Constitution of Poland and Lithuania" returned the once lost "hope of future grandeur" to Lithuania. The reforms not only put the social and political development of Lithuanian society on the track of progress, they also provided new opportunities to develop Lithuanian-language culture. It was no coincidence that the Constitution was translated into Lithuanian at that time. This fact

is underestimated in Lithuanian cultural history. Until then, only religious texts and belles-lettres were available in Lithuanian. The translation of the Constitution of May 3 was the first political and legal document in Lithuanian. Twenty-seven of thirty-three local parliaments (county *seimiki* or dietines) of the GDL gentry that assembled in February, 1792, swore an oath to the new Constitution. The remaining six voted to approve it. In this respect, the Constitution had more supporters in Lithuania than in Poland, where only ten of the forty-five local parliaments swore an oath to the Constitution, and twenty-seven more approved it.

The post of minister of the seal for foreign affairs was established by the Constitution of May 3. On 8 June 1791, this position was entrusted to Deputy Chancellor of the PLC, Joachim Littawor Chreptowicz. He assembled the first Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which formally began operations on 19 June 1791. The first task of the Ministry was to get reactions of European countries to events in the Commonwealth after the declaration of the Constitution. Particular attention was paid to embassies in Berlin and Saint Petersburg. The term of office of the first Ministry of Foreign Affairs was short – in November, 1792, it shared the fate that befell the state.

Although the Constitution of May 3 did not approach the radicalism of documents of the French Revolution, it should still be considered the turning point marking the transition from the old system of gentry rule to the modern period, thus the boundary between the Baroque Age and the Age of Enlightenment. Both of the 19th-century Polish and Lithuanian uprisings against Russia took their inspiration from the Constitution of May 3.

Destruction of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania

The aristocracy and other conservatives furiously opposed the reforms of the Constitution of May 3. The hub of the opposition was in Saint Petersburg, where Empress Catherine II of Russia had invited all of the reform's fiercest opponents. It was in Saint Petersburg that the Act of the Targowica Confederation, which opposed the reforms of the Four-Year Sejm and the new Constitution, was drafted. The document was proclaimed on 14 May 1792 in the Ukrainian town of Targowica, then part of the Kingdom of Poland. Soon after, on 22 May, the Russian army marched into the GDL near Polotsk to aid the Confederates, and the PLC-Russian

War of 1792 began. Russia's so-called "Lithuanian army" had 33,700 soldiers, against whom the GDL, with the help of Poland, could muster just 18,000 troops. Russia's "Ukrainian army" had 64,000 troops, while Poland could oppose it with only 26,000 troops. The forces were unequal, so it was anticipated that the defending army would have to retreat toward Warsaw. A serious battle took place on 11 June near Mir (now in Belarus), but Vilnius was handed over without a fight on 14 June. In late July, the defence was rallying near Brest, but right at that time, on 24 July, news came from Warsaw that King Stanisław August Poniatowski had capitulated and joined the Targowica Confederation.

On 23 July 1792, in Warsaw, the king met with 12 dignitaries (ministers) – six from Poland and six from Lithuania. The king's position was that the government should no longer oppose the Russian army, which was already positioned near Warsaw, and accept the note that had been received from Catherine II on 21 July. Seven ministers supported the king, and five were against; the latter proposed to resist and continue negotiations in order to secure the most favourable conditions possible for the state. Quantitatively, it was an incredibly small majority. It would have been even smaller if not for the fact that one of the heads of the so-called Patriotic Party, Hugo Kołłątaj, suddenly changed his position and came out in support of the king. The Lithuanian representatives made a more honourable showing than their Polish counterparts: of the five who voted in favour of further opposition, three were from Lithuania. They were: the Grand Marshal of Lithuania Ignacy Potocki, the Court Marshal of Lithuania Stanisław Sołtan, and Kazimierz Nestor Sapieha, Marshal of the Lithuanian representatives at the PLC Sejm.

Stanisław II August has been condemned for his conciliatory position. The PLC's abilities to defend itself against Russia in the war of May–July, 1792 were by no means exhausted. Admittedly, the Russians had the upper hand – they had 98,000 troops on the Lithuanian and Ukrainian fronts, while the Polish and Lithuanian army had 55–56,000. While retreating towards Warsaw, however, the latter experienced no further losses and were joined by another 40,000 troops. The GDL army did not have effective military commanders (unlike the Polish army in Ukraine, which was led by Józef Poniatowski), and was not fully prepared for war. Nevertheless, the GDL army put up resistance near Mir and in Brest, and withdrew to Warsaw without major losses. Of 72 cannons, only seven were lost.

But near Warsaw, everything came down to the position of Stanisław II August, who never even visited the front. He did not take advantage of universal mobilization nor did he form a town militia. There is no doubt that the PLC would have lost the war of 1792, but a lost war does not mean a lost state. What if the decision had been to resist? Upon losing the war, the PLC would have lost territory – perhaps more than once – but it would have survived. A state that resists resolutely shows that it is an historical entity. Hence the year 1795, when the third and last partition of Poland-Lithuania occurred, is first and foremost the year of Stanisław II August's fiasco, which was a consequence of his life history and his character. In order to consolidate his power, he played with Russia, not through the PLC Embassy in Saint Petersburg, but rather with the Russian Embassy in Warsaw. Due to his ambitions, he became preoccupied with small intrigues. He was on bad terms with all who surrounded him. Thus at crucial moments he stood alone. The society which had placed so much hope in this ruler and, by accepting the Constitution of May 3, given up their right to elect a monarch, was left disappointed and betrayed.

It was unfortunate that Poland and Lithuania did not have a more competent ruler at the end of the 18th century. Several historical events led to the inevitable.

The Targowica Confederation was approved on 25 June 1792 by the Confederation of Vilnius (i.e., Lithuania), which was headed by the Great Hetman of Lithuania Szymon Kossakowski, his brother, Bishop of Livonia Józef Kossakowski, and the Bishop of Vilnius Ignacy Massalski. On 11 September in Brest, the Targowica and Vilnius Confederations united into the Confederation of Two Nations and declared Grodno their centre. Prussia became alarmed by the potential strengthening of the PLC, and Russian Empress Catherine II was worried that the spectre of French Jacobinism had already reached the Russian border.

Two days after Louis XVI was beheaded in France on 21 January 1793, Russia and Prussia implemented the Second Partition of the PLC. All that was left of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania were the ethnic Lithuanian and western Belarusian lands. Russia forced Stanisław II August to convene the PLC Sejm on 17 June 1793 in Grodno in order to approve the new peace treaty between Russia and the PLC, and thereby authorize the Second Partition. The Sejm tried to resist, but after a few deputies were detained, the Sejm was surrounded by the Russian army, and Russian officers were sta-

tioned in the meeting hall, it ratified the Second Partition on 19 August. The Grodno Sejm and Stanisław II August were forced to renounce the Constitution of May 3 and restore the former political system, i.e., the nobiliary democracy.

The Russian-Prussian seizure of territory provoked a wave of patriotic outrage in both Poland and Lithuania. In March of 1794, an uprising began in Poland which was led by Tadeusz Kościuszko, a general from the GDL who had made his mark in the American Revolutionary War. The uprising began in Lithuania on 16 April 1794 in Šiauliai, led by Jakub Jasiński. In April, the rebels liberated Vilnius from the Russians and proclaimed the Lithuanian Uprising Act in Town Hall Square. A rebel government was formed – the Lithuanian National Supreme Council. The rebels acted decisively. They hanged the GDL Great Hetman Szymon Kossakowski and arrested the more notable Targowica supporters. The peasants were addressed for the first time in a proclamation in the Lithuanian language, appealing to them to start partisan warfare against the Russian army, with the promise of civil liberty in return.

For Poland and Lithuania, the culmination of the uprising was the execution of some of the Targowica confederates, including Bishop Ignacy Massalski of Vilnius and Bishop Józef Kossakowski of Livonia, who were hanged in Warsaw on 28 June. It was as if the rebels were repeating the course of the French Revolution – the idea of organizing executions originated in the Jacobin Club (Society of Friends of the Constitution), which opposed the official rebel government. The club organized demonstrations which forced the courts to pass the aforementioned death sentences. The Vilnius and Warsaw executions turned part of the PLC nobility against the uprising and became a pretext for the Russian army, led by Alexander Suvorov, to take action. That summer, the Russian and Prussian armies advanced. Prussian troops occupied Warsaw in June, and Russian troops occupied Vilnius in August. Warsaw surrendered on November 5. It had also been defended by Lithuanian rebels who had retreated from Vilnius. Both Jakub Jasiński, the rebel commander in Lithuania, and Tadeusz Korsak, author of the Reciprocal Guarantee of Two Nations (the addendum to the Constitution of May 3), were killed defending Warsaw.

The defeat of the uprising sped up the finale – on 24 October 1795, Russia, Austria and Prussia signed a convention in Saint Petersburg to divide the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth a third time. Part of the territory

of the GDL, i.e., the ethnic Lithuanian lands, went to Russia and remained under Russian rule until World War I. Prussia received Užnemunė, lands on the left bank of the Nemunas River, and named it New East Prussia. This territory belonged to Prussia until 1807, when Napoleon established the Duchy of Warsaw. After the Congress of Vienna in 1815, Užnemunė went to Russia. Austria also participated in the partitioning of Poland and Lithuania and received a large part of southern Poland and the southwestern corner of the GDL which, like Užnemunė, went to Russia in 1815.

On 26 January 1797, Russia, Prussia and Austria signed a new St Petersburg Convention which confirmed the Third Partition of the PLC, eliminated the remnants of its statehood, and drew precise borders. The convention was accompanied by the abdication act of Stanisław August Poniatowski. The Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth ceased to exist. The elimination of such a large historic European state was a shock to the international community and had political repercussions in international affairs throughout the 19th century and up to World War I.

CHAPTER III

LITHUANIA UNDER THE RUSSIAN EMPIRE (1795–1915)

During 1795–1915, except for a brief period in 1812 known as the Napoleonic interlude, most of Lithuania belonged to the autocratic Russian Empire. This period in history is the story of a country that was partitioned (Užnemunė, on the west bank of the Nemunas, initially went to Prussia), annexed, and occupied, a country that both adapted and resisted. It was a period marked by the dilemmas faced by those seeking to restore statehood and by the evolution of ethnic Lithuanians into an independent political culture.

For nearly forty years after annexation, Vilnius University flourished. It was the largest university in the Russian Empire and the quality of its scholarship and studies was comparable to Western Europe's. Yet from 1864, when those in power decided to change the region's cultural and ethnic identity (ostensibly to correct the "mistakes" and "wrongs" inflicted on Russia by history during the past 500 years), even apolitical Lithuanian books, newspapers, and prayer books were treated as contraband. Learning to read and write in Lithuanian had to be done in secret, away from the prying eyes of gendarmes, police and other local authorities, and in fear of exile to the remote reaches of Russia. This was also a time of epochal changes, of national identity transformations and of political conflict. Peasants, who made up almost 80% of the region's population, lived under serfdom. Even after being denied political power, the nobles and gentry continued to dominate social life. The gentry class in Poland and Lithuania was considerably more numerous than elsewhere in Europe and made up 6.5% of the population (the average in Europe and Russia was 1%). However, the landed gentry constituted only a quarter of the local gentry – the majority owned little or no land, spoke primarily Polish, and cherished the memory and traditions of lost statehood. They had a dual ethnic identity: they considered themselves to be both Lithuanians and Poles.

The GDL's gentry were unwilling to be fully integrated into the old Kingdom of Poland, yet neither did they want to be separate from it. Beyond Lithuania's borders, Lithuanian nobles were considered simply Poles. The Russian Empire's authorities considered them Poles as well.

1864 marked a dividing line. This was the year when Russia suppressed the last gentry-led uprising intended to restore the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. At the same time, the tsarist authorities began to implement Tsar Alexander II's edict of 1861, which emancipated privately owned serfs. Peasants became relatively free, since they were granted ownership of the land they cultivated. They thus became members of the free class of peasant-farmers, albeit the lowest class. By means of brutal and discriminatory Russification, the authorities tried to turn the annexed Polish and Lithuanian territories into Western Russia.

The more radical gentry could not come to terms with the loss of their state, and attempted to restore it during the Napoleonic wars and by staging two uprisings: one in 1830–1831 and the other in 1863–1864. The Lithuanian national-cultural movement also began during this time, and several decades later became a political force. Ethnic Lithuanians, or the Lithuanian people, became an independent cultural and political community that demanded independence in 1905.

THE PURSUIT OF LOST STATEHOOD

Cultural Autonomy in Napoleon's Shadow

The annexation of the GDL's lands by Russia meant the GDL's incorporation into the autocratic tsarist governmental system, a highly centralized bureaucracy subordinate to the tsar. A local administrative unit was called a governorate (*guberniya*) and was run by a governor. Governors were appointed by the tsar from the central government or other governorates and were subordinate to the Ministry of Internal Affairs. Governorates were divided into districts (*ujezdy*) that were led by district chiefs appointed by governors. In addition, in regional capitals and border areas, there was another layer of governance – the governors-general. They were appointed by the tsar to rule over several governorates and given more extensive powers, including the command of troops in their jurisdictions.

From the time of Empress Catherine II, a number of class-based self-rule institutions were incorporated into the local level of government, such as assemblies of the landed gentry in the governorates and districts, as well as municipal self-rule organs of the various classes (or sub-classes) of burghers. They were not independent but auxiliary branches of local governments that were supervised by local administrators. The district assemblies of the gentry elected some officials responsible for public order as well as judges of lower courts. Such a system of local government was also introduced in that part of the GDL that was annexed by Russia in 1795, which at the time had a population of 1.8 million, of whom 1.1 million were residents of ethnic Lithuania. (About 250,000 people lived in Užnemunė, the part of Lithuania that was initially annexed by Prussia.) The population of Vilnius was about 25,000. It was the third largest city in the Russian Empire, albeit about a tenth the size of Saint Petersburg or Moscow. Right before the abolition of serfdom in 1861, the population of Vilnius was almost 60,000.

Initially, two governorates were to be established in the annexed territory, but a year later they were merged into one and named the Lithuanian Governorate (*Litovskaya guberniya*). In 1801, this governorate was again divided in two: the Lithuania-Vilnius Governorate and the Lithuania-Grodno Governorate. Both of them were made subordinate to the Governor-General's office that was established that year in Vilnius. In 1819, a narrow coastal strip that included the Palanga and Šventoji townships was transferred from the Vilnius Governorate to the Courland Governorate.

Almost the entire Vilnius Governorate, which was divided into 11 districts, and the northern part of the Grodno Governorate were historically and ethnically Lithuanian. But the inhabitants of the eastern and southeastern borderlands of these governorates were becoming bilingual and increasingly adopting Belarusian as their language of choice. They began losing their Lithuanian identity without acquiring a Belarusian identity. They simply considered themselves to be locals (*tutejszy*). From a pragmatic point of view, Belarusian was more practical for them because it enabled them to understand and communicate with their Polish-speaking lords and priests as well as the Russian authorities. This process of increasing disuse of Lithuanian gained greater momentum in the second half of the 19th century, but was later halted by influential activists of the Lithuanian national movement, mostly priests.

In 1843, seven districts in the western and northern parts of the Vilnius Governorate were merged to create the Kaunas Governorate and three other districts that belonged to the Minsk and Grodno governorates were merged into the Vilnius Governorate. Consequently, only the Kaunas Governorate was viewed as ethnically Lithuanian by the tsarist authorities, while the Vilnius Governorate was considered to be Belarusian, despite the fact that its western part was primarily Lithuanian.

During the 1830s, the Russian system of territorial administration was introduced in Congress Poland, which was effectively a Russian puppet state. Lithuania's Užnemunė belonged to a governorate that was initially called Augustów (Lith. *Augustavas*), but changed its name to Suwałki (Lith. *Suvalkai*) in 1867. It encompassed about one sixth of the current territory of Lithuania. Until 1807 Užnemunė belonged to Prussia; from 1807 to 1814, to the Duchy of Warsaw, created by Napoleon Bonaparte. The latter was officially called the Kingdom of Poland and was not considered an integral part of the Russian Empire in terms of formal political administration. Although the political conditions in the greater part of ethnic Lithuania were different from those in Užnemunė, the formation of the modern nation was moving in the same direction in both areas.

Merging the core lands of the GDL into Russia did not essentially change the situation of the peasants. The worst thing for them was conscription, which meant 25 years of forced service in the Russian army (the annual conscription quota was 5–7 men of enlistment age for each thousand; the quota would be doubled in wartime). Small towns lost their autonomy, and the majority of their residents became serfs. The capitals of the governorates did not lose their autonomy, and autonomy was restored to district centres. Jewish communities (kahals) were also autonomous until 1840, when Jews were brought into the general municipal administrations. Jews were forbidden to engage in agriculture; residence boundaries within the empire were established for them (the Pale of Settlement, largely corresponding to the territory of the former Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth), and they were forbidden to move to either of the two Russian capitals, unless they were educated and qualified professionals.

The Lithuanian gentry lost their country, of course, but gained the rights exercised by the Russian gentry and became privileged subjects of the empire. Few lost their estates. Even former supporters of the insurrectionist General Tadeusz Kościuszko were able to claim their estates upon returning

from abroad and swearing allegiance to the Russian tsar. Among such returnees was the large landowner and composer Michał Kleofas Ogiński, who wrote a famous polonaise, "Farewell to the Homeland". The gentry had a measure of self-rule in governorates and districts through their regional assemblies, which exercised auxiliary government functions. The *Statutes of Lithuania* remained in effect, and the Polish language was allowed in municipal institutions, district administrations, lower courts, and the education system. Vilnius University at this time was transitioning from teaching in Latin to teaching in Polish. Thus the annexed territory acquired cultural autonomy.

Portrait of Michał Kleofas Ogiński by François-Xavier Fabre, 1805–1806. Ogiński was a participant in the 1794 uprising and the author of the last project to restore the GDL's independence.

At the beginning of the 19th century, some of the Vilnius intelligentsia helped draft an educational reform for the entire Russian empire that was based on the working model crafted by the Commission for National Education of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth (PLC). This reform led to the establishment of a large Vilnius Educational District, which encompassed all the territory of the PLC that was annexed by Russia, a territory containing nine million inhabitants. The district's centre was Vilnius University, which was reorganized in 1803 according to European university standards and granted the status of an imperial university. Until 1824, the University's curator was the Polish nobleman Adam Jerzy Czartoryski (1770–1861), a personal friend of Tsar Alexander I; for a time Czartoryski also served as the Russian Foreign Minister. For Czartoryski, the educational district was a preparatory step towards restoring the Polish (or Polish-Lithuanian) state under the auspices of the Russian Empire. This plan ran counter to the hopes of those who from the end of the 18th century were orienting themselves toward the rising star of post-revolutionary France – Napoleon.

Napoleon's troops crossing the Nemunas River in 1812 on their way to Russia. Painting by Jean Baptiste Madou, 1827.

In 1807, the Duchy of Warsaw first appeared on the map of Europe. It was a quasi-independent state created by Napoleon when he concluded the Treaty of Tilsit with Prussia. The Duchy comprised the Polish and Lithuanian lands previously annexed by Prussia. In 1809, this state fought a short war with Austria and captured most of the areas annexed by Austria during the partitions of the PLC. The Duchy adopted the Napoleonic Code and granted its peasants personal freedom, although without property rights to land and without the right to leave one's residence or farm without the knowledge of the landowner.

In June of 1812, Napoleon began a war with Russia, and soon much of the territory of the former GDL came under his rule. Napoleon permitted the creation of a Provisional Government Commission of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, which maintained public order and undertook to organize military units for Napoleon's Army (one third of the Army consisted of regiments from the Duchy of Warsaw). In July, at a meeting in the cathedral of Vilnius, Lithuanian officials, with a delegation from the Duchy of Warsaw in attendance, declared their wish to renew the union with Poland and to reclaim the lost lands of the GDL. Napoleon, however, had to retreat

The retreat of the French Army through the Town Hall Square in Vilnius. Painting by Johann Damehl (Lith. Jonas Damelis) from Jan Kazimierz Wilczyński's *Album de Wilna*, 1846.

from Moscow and during this retreat lost most of his Army. By the end of 1812, Lithuania was retaken by the Russians.

The 1830–1831 Uprising

Alexander I decided not to retaliate against the Lithuanian gentry who broke their oath of allegiance to him, and everything remained the same, except that the passage of huge armies across the country twice in six months devastated the economy. According to the settlement concluded at the Congress of Vienna in 1815, most of the Duchy of Warsaw, including Lithuania's Užnemunė, was newly reconstituted as the Kingdom of Poland, otherwise known as Congress Poland, and the right of succession to its throne was claimed by Russia's ruling dynasty. Lithuania's gentry wanted Lithuania to become part of this new Kingdom of Poland as well, but Tsar Alexander I did not allow it.

Vilnius University became the social and cultural centre of all the historical Lithuanian lands and the most prominent centre of Polish culture outside ethnic Poland. During the first quarter of the 19th century,

the University flourished. The number of students increased from 200 to 1,300. The University was able to attract renowned scholars and scientists: the historian and bibliographer Joachim Lelewel (1786–1861); the mathematician, philosopher and astronomer Jan Śniadecki (1756–1830); the physician, chemist and biologist Jędrzej Śniadecki (1768–1838); the physicians and naturalists Ludwig Heinrich Bojanus (1776–1827) and Karl Eichwald (1795–1876); as well as the physicians Johann Peter Frank (1745–1821) and his son Joseph Frank (1771–1842) from Germany. Their work was known internationally.

The University was also involved in the publishing of numerous periodicals. In the years following 1812, the Freemasonry movement became very popular in Lithuania. The majority of intellectuals belonged to Masonic lodges. The *Zealous Lithuanian* (*Gorliwy Litwin*) was the best-known lodge. There were a number of secret student societies at the university that engaged in activities aimed at fostering cultural development and moral improvement, truth, freedom, and loyalty to the homeland. Among the members of such organizations was the Romantic poet Adam Mickiewicz, whose work includes a poem to his Lithuanian homeland. In 1822, the first book of his poetry was published in Vilnius to much acclaim in the entire country; later, his poetry became renowned throughout Europe.

A portrait of Adam Mickiewicz by S. Heymann, 1897.

Although these organizations did not engage in any conspiracies against the government, they created an atmosphere that hardly encouraged obedience to authority. The tsarist administration began an investigation that evolved into the largest trial of university students and secondary school pupils in Europe at that time. Charges were filed against more than one hundred individuals, and about twenty of them, including Adam Mickiewicz, were sent into exile or forced into military service. Professors deemed politically unreli-

able, such as Joachim Lelewel, were sent into exile as well. The University's curator, Adam Jerzy Czartoryski, was forced to resign. The territory of the Vilnius Educational District was reduced. Tsar Nicholas I's administration became ever more vigilant with the establishment of the secret police.

The attack on 29 November 1830 by rebellious young Polish army officers against the Belweder Palace in Warsaw, seat of Russian Grand Duke Constantine, the viceroy of Congress Poland and brother of Tsar Alexander I, began the November Uprising. The uprising spread throughout the city. On 25 January 1831, the Kingdom's Sejm passed an act dethroning Tsar Nicholas I as King of Poland and granting sovereignty to the people. This was, in effect, a declaration of independence, making war with Russia inevitable.

In Lithuania, the uprising began spontaneously in Samogitia in the spring of 1831. It was triggered by a government conscription drive. For this reason, the rebel units, though led by the local petty gentry, included many peasants; in some cases, peasants made up the majority. The proclamations of the rebels were issued in both Polish and Lithuanian (Samogitian) and included demands to free the serfs. There was no single governing body or headquarters in charge of the uprising in Lithuania. There were a number of "governments" active in specific territories of a district, one of which proclaimed itself Samogitia's government. By May, the rebels had taken control of almost the entire area to the west and north of Vilnius.

In June of 1831, the regular army of the Kingdom of Poland was sent to Lithuania for strategic reasons. The Army consisted of about 12,600 soldiers, and it was led by General Antoni Gielgud (Lith. Antanas Gelgaudas). They captured Kaunas easily, but did not rush to attack Vilnius, because they were busy forming a provisional Polish government in Lithuania. Finally, the Poles decided to attack Vilnius, hoping that the city itself would rise in rebellion, but nothing of the sort happened. The Polish army and rebel units suffered a defeat on the outskirts of the city. Some Polish units managed to break through and return to Poland, other unit remnants crossed the border into Prussia. That autumn, Russia put down the rebellion in Poland itself and reclaimed the Kingdom of Poland.

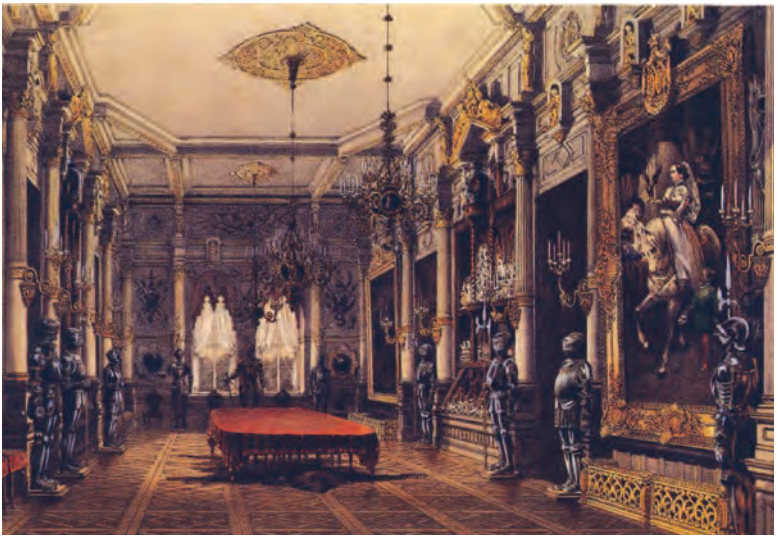
Not including the Polish army, Lithuania's rebel units numbered about 30,000 fighters. A young noblewoman, Emilia Plater-Broel, who fought in men's clothing on horseback, became a legend of the uprising. In the autumn, while retreating into Poland proper, she fell ill and died.

The Tsarist Government: "There Shall Be No Poland Here"

After the uprising, the Kingdom of Poland lost its political autonomy, while in the former lands of the GDL, the tsarist government began implementing a new policy, which they called "the Polish origins annihilation" policy. The ideological basis of this policy was the idea, dating from the time of Ivan the Terrible (reigned 1547–1584), that the GDL's lands belonged to Russia by virtue of its "historical priority" to the Rus'ian, or Ruthenian, heritage. In this view, prior to the Catholic conversion of pagan Lithuania and its dynastic union with Poland at Krewo, the Grand Duchy of Lithuania was one of the strongest Russian states, competing with Moscow to unify the Russian lands. Therefore, the creators of this state, namely, the ethnic Lithuanians, eventually would have become Russian. After the Union of Lublin (1569), according to this view, the GDL was just a territory of Poland. Therefore, by reclaiming what supposedly belonged to it by "the right of historical priority", Russia had the right – by force, if necessary – "to restore historical justice". Institutions that helped to differentiate this country from the rest of Russia were consequently eliminated. The use of Polish in local administrations was banned. Only Russian was to be used in schools. Local gentry were allowed to work in their local administrations only after ten years of service in other Russian governorates.

In 1832, a decision was made to close Vilnius University. The initiators of this decision claimed that it was "a den of free-thinking in Lithuania". Only the faculties of medicine and theology were kept. They were transformed into academies subordinate to the Russian Ministry of Internal Affairs: the Vilnius Medical-Surgical Academy and the Vilnius Roman Catholic Theological Academy. Ten years later the latter was moved from Vilnius to Saint Petersburg, while the former was closed. In 1840, the *Statutes of Lithuania* were repealed, and the judicial system was made to resemble its Russian counterpart. The word "Lithuania" was removed from the names of the Vilnius and Grodno governorates, while the former Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth was now considered Western Russia, and the former territory of the GDL was now called the Northwestern Territory.

There was also a change in attitude of the authorities towards the Church. Many Catholic monasteries were accused of helping the rebels and were closed. The Uniate Church was dissolved in 1839, and the Uni-



Reminiscent of old times – interior of the Verkiai Palace in Vilnius. A painting by Philippe Benoist in Jan Kazimierz Wilczyński's *Album de Wilna*, 1848.

ates were forced to return to the Russian Orthodox fold. Books and other publications in Polish were not completely banned: in 1835–1841, a nine-volume Polish-language *History of the Lithuanian Nation* from the early Middle Ages to the Union of Lublin by historian and military engineer Teodor Narbutt was published in Vilnius. In 1841–1851, the prolific Polish writer and Lithuanian (GDL) patriot, Józef Ignacy Kraszewski, published the cultural magazine *Atheneum* in Vilnius.

Lithuanian was not officially banned either. In 1841, the authorities gave permission to establish church schools in the Diocese of Telšiai (Samogitia). The schools were permitted to teach pupils to read and write in Lithuanian and to teach religion, but it was also mandatory to introduce pupils to the Russian alphabet. Thus the authorities were inclined to treat these schools as a preparatory step toward public Russian elementary schools.

Russia's defeat in the Crimean War (1853–1856) motivated the newly inaugurated Tsar Alexander II to prepare for the abolition of serfdom, and to make nationality policies less stringent. In the spring of 1861, the new Emperor signed a decree that proclaimed the emancipation of serfs on private estates, including household serfs. Serfs became free citizens – they were able to marry without a landlord's consent, to own property and

to own a business. Laws were passed regulating how serfs were to acquire land they worked from their landlords. Household serfs were only granted their freedom, but no rights to land. The reforms were to go into effect in two years. Soon after, a wave of patriotic demonstrations rippled through Warsaw and Vilnius, and did not subside until the tsar imposed martial law at the end of the summer.

In 1862, in Congress Poland and Lithuania, Red organizations began forming to organize an uprising. The Reds were pro-democratic noble youth who believed that they could count on the serfs to take part in an uprising, since they thought the serfs would be disappointed by the limited nature of their emancipation. Although Lithuania's Reds were for a federation with Poland based on parity, some saw the future as a federation of three or maybe even four nations (Poland, Lithuania, and Rus'; or Poles, Lithuanians, Belarusians, and Ukrainians). In their agitation pamphlets in Polish, Lithuanian, and Belarusian, the Reds promised serfs freedom and property rights to all the land they farmed without having to compensate their landlords for it. They hoped that the tsar's limited emancipation reforms would bring about unrest in Russia's villages, and that the authorities would not be able to dispatch many troops against the rebels. The Whites were an alternative organization comprising mostly large landowners who were not interested in escalating the emancipation issue, and who saw the forthcoming uprising as an opportunity to exert pressure on the tsar to finally "restore" autonomy to the Kingdom of Poland. The Whites hoped that once the uprising started, the western powers that won the Crimean War (France and Great Britain) would put pressure on Russia.

The 1863–1864 Uprising

A new army conscription drive was announced at the end of January in 1863. The Reds felt they had no choice but to start an uprising, even though they were not well prepared yet. Poland's underground provisional national government announced the beginning of the uprising on January 22. On February 1, leaflets in Polish and Lithuanian were distributed in the former territory of the GDL to announce the beginning of the uprising there. Fearing that Lithuania's Reds were too radical, Poland's government put the Whites in charge of the uprising in Lithuania.

Just as during the first uprising, the majority of rebel units were established and operated in historically ethnic Lithuania. But this time the authorities were prepared to put down the uprising. A hundred thousand Russian troops were deployed in the Vilnius military district; during 1863 that number increased by 150 percent, because after the Crimean War the tsarist government was not sure whether or not their former enemies would undertake any military action by the Baltic Sea. Rebel units did not have the capacity to control large territories. Zygmunt Sierakowski, a former captain in the general headquarters of the Russian Army, was appointed head of the uprising in Lithuania in the spring. He tried to unite rebel units in the Kaunas Governorate into an army, but that gave the enemy a chance to draw a lot of blood with one blow. In early May, Sierakowski's rebel army was defeated near Biržai, Sierakowski himself was wounded and captured, and later publicly hanged in Vilnius. After Sierakowski's death, a young Lithuanian priest, Antanas Mackevičius, was appointed head of the uprising in the Kaunas Governorate. The rebels no longer tried to unite into larger units, but waged a partisan war using guerrilla tactics.

With England and France merely sending diplomatic notes urging Russia to avoid further bloodshed, the Russian government acted resolutely. Mikhail Muravyov ("the hangman of Vilnius") was appointed Governor-General of Vilnius. He had experience in putting down the uprising of 1830 in southeastern Lithuania and Belarus, and with the tsar's approval, used brutal terror tactics. He cunningly played the peasant card and took away the rebel advantage by making adjustments to the emancipation reforms in Lithuania that sped up the process in favour of the peasants. The reforms were consequently implemented without coordinating with landowners, as had been prescribed in the 1861 legislative acts. In July, Poland's uprising leadership reinstated the Reds to lead the uprising in Lithuania by appointing Konstanty Kalinowski, a fervent patriot and supporter of the national revival in Belarus, as head. Nevertheless, the uprising started petering out. At the end of 1863, the Russians captured Antanas Mackevičius, and later Konstanty Kalinowski, and hanged them both publicly.

From the military point of view, the 60,000 rebels stood no chance of winning, and pinning their hopes on a peasant uprising in Russia was an illusion. Nor did the West intend to shed blood over "Poland's issues". Over 6,000 rebels but only about 320 Russian troops died in battles in the former territories of the GDL. About 25,000 people, mostly young men, were

Painting of the 1863 uprising by Michał Elwiro Andriolli: the artist depicts himself retreating with a mortally wounded friend at the battle of Dubičiai on May 5.

sentenced to hard labour or exile. The authorities confiscated many estates, closed Catholic monasteries and churches, and decided that the time was right to finally resolve the "Polish question".

The "Duchy" of Bishop Motiejus Valančius

By the end of the 18th century, the Enlightenment ideas embodied by the French Revolution gave birth to the modern concept of a nation. In this view, a nation as a political and cultural community comprises not only the upper classes and the well educated, but all its citizens and subjects. The common people are the nation's foundation and must be educated to share in the so-called high culture of the upper classes. A question arose: what language should be used to educate and integrate all the subjects of a polity into the nation – the vernacular language or the language used by the nobility? The majority of the nobility felt that the language to be used should be the language of the dominant classes. In their view, the

vernacular was fit for the public elementary schools, but these schools must also be obligated to teach everyone the language of the ruling classes. This attitude prevailed in the majority of West European countries, and it was also shared by the Polish-speaking elite of the former PLC until 1831.

However, in Central and Eastern Europe, the ideas of Johann Gottfried Herder and other German Romantics gained popularity. They maintained that a nation's spirit lies in its vernacular language and culture, that every language and culture is a valuable treasure of all humankind. A particular nation comprises all who speak the same language and share a common history and culture. For that reason, the vernacular should also be fostered and developed as a distinct high culture language. If such a process were successful, then this language would become the dominant high culture language in the country, and subsequently the elite would have to choose whether to remain in the minority with their chosen language, or become a part of the newly forming national entity.

Such ideas gained support in Lithuania, especially since some European linguists had already established that the language spoken by Lithuanian peasants was one of the most archaic living Indo-European languages. In 1808, the Warsaw Society of Friends of Science published a book entitled *On the Origins of the Lithuanian Nation and Language* (*O początkach narodu języka litewskiego rozprawa*) by Ksawery Bohusz, a priest and theologian born in Lithuania. This book was the first to express the idea that the Lithuanian language was entirely suitable to be the language of a separate high culture. This idea encouraged several intellectuals from Samogitia (Dionizas Poška, Silvestras Valiūnas) to start writing poetry in Lithuanian (in the Samogitian dialect). When the renowned scholar Ludwig Rhesa published Kristijonas Donelaitis's poem *The Seasons* (*Metai*) in Königsberg in 1818, many were impressed. Kristijonas Donelaitis (1714–1780) was a Prussian Lithuanian and Lutheran pastor who lived and worked in Lithuania Minor (Tolminkiemis). The poem was published a few decades after his death and included a German translation. It was acknowledged at the time that the poem was of great literary value and universal significance.

At Vilnius University, a small group of intellectuals (Simonas Daukantas, Simonas Stanevičius, and a few others), mostly from Samogitia, formed a group dedicated to developing a high culture in Lithuanian (Samogitian), and at the same time concerned themselves with educat-

Portrait of Simonas Daukantas by Jonas Zenkevičius, 1850.

ing Lithuanians and Samogitians in their native language. (At the time some held Samogitians to be a separate ethnic group related to Lithuanians, but Samogitians considered themselves to be Samogitian Lithuanians.) This small group of intellectuals spearheaded the national cultural movement of ethnic Lithuanians. A trailblazing Lithuanian primer in the Samogitian dialect was written and published in Lithuanian, and poet Simonas Stanevičius (1799–1848) published a poetry book that included a poem entitled "The Glory of the Samogitians" (*"Šlovė žemaičių"*). The poem was virtually the movement's unofficial hymn or poetic manifesto. It declared that attempts to bury the Samogitians (Lithuanians) as a nation would fail. The historian and lawyer Simonas Daukantas (1793–1864) wrote the first major history of Lithuania in Lithuanian (*Deeds of the Ancient Lithuanians and Samogitians*) in 1822. It was hand-copied by enthusiasts and read widely. Later Simonas Daukantas moved to Saint Petersburg and obtained employment at the Russian State Senate Office and Archives in order to gain access to important Lithuanian state documents of the 15th–18th centuries. He wrote two more major books on Lithuanian history in Lithuanian, and published a study on Lithuanian ethnic culture, *The Character of Ancient Lithuanians, Samogitians, and Highlanders* (*Būdas senovės lietuvių, žemaičių ir kalnėnų*). He also published a series of educational books intended for literate peasant-farmers, compiled dictionaries and even wrote a textbook in Lithuanian for secondary schools.

It was Simonas Daukantas who talked his fellow countryman Motiejus Valančius (1801–1875), then teaching at the Roman Catholic Theological Academy in Saint Petersburg (where it had been relocated from Vilnius), into writing and publishing a history of the Samogitian Diocese in Lithuanian. When this book came out in Vilnius in 1848 – the same year that its author was appointed Bishop of the Diocese of Telšiai (Samogitia) – everyone was surprised that it was written in Lithuanian, not Polish, as was the

custom. The Romantic Simonas Daukantas admired Lithuania's pre-Christian past, while Motiejus Valančius, who was practical and politically astute, undoubtedly supported Catholicism and European civilization. Bishop Valančius preached his inaugural sermon both in Lithuanian and in Polish. It was probably the first time that Lithuanian (Samogitian) was spoken in that cathedral by a bishop.

Engraving of Motiejus Valančius by Adolphe Lafosse in Jan Kazimierz Wilczyński's *Album de Wilna*, 1857.

Motiejus Valančius made sure that priests treated Lithuanian speakers with respect, that they became proficient in Lithuanian and preached in Lithuanian. He also instructed priests to establish Lithuanian parochial schools. The Diocese of Telšiai at that time encompassed most of ethnic Lithuania, not only Samogitia. The parochial schools were superior to the Russian public schools. In some areas the literacy rate increased to 60% – a fantastic achievement under conditions of serfdom. Moreover, in 1858, Valančius initiated a temperance movement based on similar movements in other Catholic countries. In just a few years, over 80% of Catholics in the diocese belonged to these temperance societies. Lithuanians stopped drinking vodka, farms became wealthier, families became stronger, and people became educated. No other country in Europe reached such a scale of involvement in a temperance movement.

The tsarist administration began to feel threatened by the bishop's success in mobilizing the community. People began referring to him as the Duke of Samogitia. Motiejus Valančius never said a word against the tsar, and interacted respectfully with his representatives. But he was also firm and resolute in defending the interests of the Catholic Church. He recognized that the tsar was not only openly protecting the Russian Orthodox Church, but that he was also trying to strengthen its influence in Catholic regions. The common people were becoming the major determinant of

success in this battle. This became apparent after 1863, when the bishop secretly admonished people not to give in to the wiles of the tsarist regime, and the people listened and successfully resisted Russification. By this time the bishop was well known for what he had accomplished for ordinary people and he had become an acknowledged authority figure to them. Though not a politician, Bishop Valančius had a greater influence on 19th century politics in Lithuania than anyone else. While nurturing the people's loyalty to their language and culture, he never spoke against Polish speakers. He himself kept his diary in Polish and signed his name in Polish –Wołonczewski.

Under conditions of serfdom and foreign occupation, the Lithuanian national cultural movement could not move into the forefront of the country's social, cultural and political life. Nonetheless, Antanas Baranauskas (1835–1902), a second generation representative of this movement, a native of the region of Aukštaitija, a priest and poet, a future bishop, and author of the Lithuanian masterpiece – the lengthy poem *The Forest of Anykščiai* (*Anykščių šilelis*) – wrote in 1859: "I will give to Lithuanians the whole world's scholarship, I will translate into Lithuanian the whole world's literature, all Lithuanians will be thinkers, they will be world leaders in all areas of knowledge." This idealistic vision of a civilized, highly cultured nation, alas, was to remain but a vision. There are no examples in European history where dominant political powers would sincerely support such goals. Despite the fact that before the 1863 uprising the tsarist government had declared that one of its goals was to prevent the Polonization of Lithuanian peasants, it did not permit the publication of a Lithuanian newspaper and rejected Valančius's project to establish a Lithuanian secondary school. As one of the project's experts noted, "It will not be easier for Russia if her new obstinate enemies do not speak Polish, but print conspiracies, proclamations and underground instructions in Samogitian."

A PEOPLE BECOME A NATION

Although the domestic policy of the Russian Empire with respect to its non-Russian regions and "borderlands" was not excessively nationalistic at the time (nationalism would become the empire's dominant principle of domestic policy during the reign of Alexander III in 1881–1894), a wave of nationalism and xenophobia

swept Russia's upper strata after both uprisings. The empire's policy regarding the "Polish question" came to be dominated by those who believed that force should be used in the region without seeking accommodation with the local people. They hoped to change the cultural environment that allowed constantly recurring separatism to flourish, and believed that by turning the peasants into an independent class after abolishing serfdom, this could be done. For separatism thrived first and foremost among the nobles, who considered themselves a separate political nation, while the peasants – the masses – were not members of that nation. Those charged with Russifying the population intended to succeed by reinforcing their policy of "eliminating Polish elements" in the culture with a policy of "restoring Russian elements".

Russification Policy during 1864–1904

Vilnius Governor General Mikhail Muravyov, who suppressed the January Uprising of 1863, was responsible for implementing the Russification policy. He was aided by his old acquaintance Ivan Kornilov, curator of the Vilnius educational district. The programme consisted of a number of special economic and cultural measures intended to weaken the economic position of the local gentry and ensure that in the territories of the PLC that were annexed by Russia and now officially treated as "Russian lands of old", Russian would replace Polish in public affairs, the Russian Orthodox Church would gain a dominant position, and peasant children would be integrated into Russian high culture.

The Catholic Church was one of the undesirable "Polish elements", but because of international political considerations, the tsarist government was unable to take direct action to liquidate it. But the activities of the Church were restricted, Catholics were discriminated against, and thus encouraged to adopt Orthodoxy. Supporters of the policy of "restoring Russian elements" argued over tactics regarding ethnic Lithuanians. Those who did not want to entrust the practice of instilling "Russian elements" to the local residents triumphed, so Lithuanian was not allowed in educational institutions. "Russian elements" were to be instilled by Russian teachers, usually from the heart of Russia. Initially, the majority came from Russian Orthodox seminaries. Moreover, supporters of such tactics believed that the Lithuanian language would succumb to progress in any case, and that

Lithuanian School 1864–1904. An allegorical sculpture depicting a mother at her spinning wheel teaching her child how to read, reflecting the state of Lithuanian-language education under the Russian Empire. Sculptor Petras Rimša, 1906.

there was no point in bothering with a language that was spoken by just a few million people and had scanty written texts.

Nevertheless, even the authorities understood how challenging it was for a non-Lithuanian-speaking Russian teacher to start teaching children in Russian in rural schools in ethnic Lithuania. Thus plans were made to prepare bilingual grammar books that would have Russian words translated into Lithuanian but written in Cyrillic, not Roman, letters. From this the idea evolved to replace the Roman alphabet traditionally used in Lithuanian with the Cyrillic alphabet. In 1864, Muravyov banned use of the traditional Lithuanian alphabet. This ban was extended to the entire territory of Russia and stayed in effect until the spring of 1904.

In the Russian-occupied territory of the former Kingdom of Poland, there was no discussion about eliminating the Polish language and culture from public life and educational institutions. It was, however, mandatory to learn Russian as a means of "bringing the Poles and Russians closer togeth-

er". The Poles were expected to finally stop dreaming about restoring their former state and to understand that as Slavs they were better off under the Russian Empire than their countrymen living under Prussian and Austrian rule. The goal of "bringing the Poles and Russians closer together" was also intended to protect non-Polish residents in the kingdom from Polonization. The Tsar mandated the establishment of Russian-language schools in Lithuania's Užnemunė region, where Lithuanian was taught only as a second language from textbooks in the Cyrillic alphabet. Lithuanian was also offered as an elective course in a few secondary schools in Užnemunė. Moscow University reserved ten state scholarships for students who had earned a grade in Lithuanian on their secondary school record. In this way, they hoped that Lithuanians themselves, by becoming participants in the high culture of Russia, would become the link that would bring Lithuanians closer to Russian culture.

This policy remained in effect for 40 years in the Kingdom of Poland and the former lands of the PLC annexed by the Russian Empire, but its results were different than expected. Although Orthodox churches were built in all district centres and larger towns, they had few parishioners. In Vilnius, about ten Orthodox churches were built or "rebuilt" (in locations where they had existed until the 17th century). The goal was to show that Vilnius, the centre of the Northwestern Territory (as the territory encompassing today's Lithuania and Belarus was now called), was as much Orthodox as it was Catholic. St Casimir's Church in Vilnius was turned into a Russian Orthodox cathedral. Building new or restoring existing Catholic churches was prohibited. This prohibition, a source of great discontent among Catholics, was lifted by tsarist decree only at the end of the 19th century. The attempt to lure a large number of Catholics to convert to Orthodoxy failed.

Russian cultural centres arose in the towns of ethnic Lithuania, but they were part of the cultural life of the ruling Russian minority only. The authorities failed to attract peasants to their side, because rural residents in the greater part of ethnic Lithuania were determined to learn to read and write in their native language, thanks to the pastoral work and teachings of Bishop Motiejus Valančius. After the 1863–64 uprising, when only Russian schools with Russian teachers were allowed to function, the Bishop advised rural residents, through trusted priests, against enrolling their children in such schools. To prevent illiteracy, he encouraged people to set

up clandestine rural schools and have a literate villager teach others. Such small schools, called *daraktorinės*, became widespread in towns as well. Although they were persecuted by the police, and their teachers, if caught, were sometimes exiled to the depths of Russia for several years, people were undeterred. There was a need and a tradition developed.

Ethnic Lithuania probably had the lowest percentage of children attending official (Russian) elementary schools in the entire European part of the Russian Empire. At the end of the 19th century, approximately 66% of boys and 18% of girls attended elementary schools in the European part of the Russian Empire, but those numbers were, respectively, 21% and 4% in the Kaunas Governorate. Nevertheless, the first Russian census conducted in 1897 showed that almost 48% of ethnic Lithuanians were literate, albeit only every fifth one could read Russian. The average number of literate people among ethnic Lithuanians was almost twice as high as Russia's average, and only lower, excepting the Jews, than that of Latvians and Estonians, who were taught legally in their native languages. It surprised experts greatly that literacy among women in the Kaunas Governorate, counting all residents, not just ethnic Lithuanians, was higher than literacy among men in the Kaunas Governorate – 55% and 52% respectively.

The effort of the authorities to replace the traditional Latin alphabet with Cyrillic in Lithuanian literature was also unsuccessful. If the authorities had allowed Lithuanian elementary schools and Lithuanian teachers, if they had not discriminated against the Catholic Church and not tried to convert Catholics to Orthodoxy, the alphabet may not have been an issue. Bishop Valančius recognized the proselytizing intent of the authorities and conveyed a message through the clergy that it was a sin for Catholics to read such books. Therefore, hardly anyone read them, and since there was no demand, the authorities published only 60 of them.

After urging people to reject books forced on them by the authorities, the bishop secretly arranged for the publication of Lithuanian books in the traditional alphabet in East Prussia, and for smuggling them into Lithuania. Smuggling books became a strong tradition, and toward the end of the 19th century Lithuanian books published in East Prussia, smuggled across the border and distributed in Lithuania were increasingly abundant.

Although the authorities and gendarmes (Russian police) tried to catch book smugglers and punished them even more severely than teach-

ers in the clandestine schools, this did not stop the flow of Lithuanian publications into Lithuania. During the time that the Lithuanian press was banned, about 1,800 Lithuanian books and brochures in about 5.5 million copies were published in East Prussia for Lithuania Major. Most of the publications were religious tracts and grammars, while popular scientific, political, and literary works became more numerous toward the end of the century. Lithuanian immigrants in the United States also published over 700 titles, and some of these made their way into Lithuania as well.

Book smuggler. Sculpture by Juozas Zikaras, 1939.

The policies directed by the Russian authorities against the Polish language and culture in the former lands of the GDL were also unsuccessful. The Russian authorities did not accomplish their goals. The empire's social base in the greater part of the region did not get any stronger. Nonetheless, the policies had an indirect effect: the statehood tradition of the PLC would become incompatible with the newly forming national identities of the Poles and Lithuanians.

"Lithuanians We Are Born!"

Twenty years after the 1863 uprising, the ethnic Lithuanian national revival began anew. It was spearheaded by the post-serfdom intelligentsia and Lithuanian graduates of Russia's higher education institutions, most of whom came from Užnemunė. At first they continued to espouse the vision of a common Lithuanian-Polish state, but after they saw the success of the national movements of Latvians, Estonians, Czechs, and

The national patriarch, Dr. Jonas Basanavičius.

Bulgarians, all of which developed more or less legally, they could not help but wonder why the authorities were so unjust toward ethnic Lithuanians in their homeland. And fighting for justice they considered a matter of honour for an intellectual.

In 1883, a group of intellectuals launched the first Lithuanian periodical published in the Lithuanian language and traditional orthography, *Aušra*, or *Auszra* (*The Dawn*). It was a monthly that was printed in East Prussia and intended for Lithuania Major. Its first editor was Jonas Basanavičius (1851–1927), who hailed from the Užnemunė region but at the time lived in Prague. He graduated from the Moscow Medical Academy in 1879, but from his youth he had an abiding interest in Indo-European and Baltic history as well as Lithuanian culture. The clandestinely published illegal monthly helped galvanize the national movement and attract new adherents. It opposed the tsarist authorities and demanded that ethnic Lithuanians should at least be able to enjoy the same cultural opportunities and educational conditions as those allowed Latvians and Estonians in the Russian Empire. Although the newspaper devoted much attention to Lithuania's history, it dissociated itself from the traditions of the Union of Lublin. The idea of an independent Lithuania as a state of Lithuanian-speaking people was raised in its pages as a vague daydream.

The idea of an independent Lithuania ignited national aspirations. Even though *Aušra* was discontinued after three years due to internal disagreements and financial difficulties, it had greatly increased the ranks of the independence movement and new publications soon appeared. In 1889–1890, the Lithuanian national movement and its press diverged in two directions: secular–liberal and Catholic–conservative. *Aušra's* ideas were furthered by the periodical *Varpas* (*The Bell*) which was launched in 1889 by a secret Lithuanian student society in Warsaw called *Lietuva*

(*Lithuania*). It was edited until his death by the physician Vincas Kudirka (1858–1899). In his youth, he felt himself to be more a Pole, but reading an issue of *Aušra* quickly changed his thinking and made him "feel Lithuanian". Vincas Kudirka wrote poetry, including the poem *Tautiška giesmė* (*National Hymn*), for which he also wrote the music. It later became Lithuania's national anthem. *Varpas* supported liberal democratic views, sometimes leaning toward social democratic ones; it addressed issues related to the political order, criticized the tsarist government and its cultural policies, and was concerned with the formation of standard written Lithuanian. It published good fiction, poetry (both original and translated) and popular scientific articles. The same editorial staff published a newspaper for rural readers entitled *Ūkininkas* (*The Farmer*). The Catholic press focused mostly on opposing Russification, but followed the general doctrine of the Church and was loyal to the tsarist government. The most popular newspaper was *Tėvynės sargas* (*Homeland Guard*), which began publication in 1896, and whose *spiritus movens* was a young priest, Juozas Tumas-Vaižgantas, who later became a well-known writer and the embodiment of tolerance and benevolence.

The first political party emanating from the Lithuanian national revival was the Lithuanian Social Democratic Party, established in 1896. It published in both Lithuanian and Polish. The party's programme stated its goal of establishing a sovereign Lithuanian state within a loose confederation of neighbouring states.

The works of the Polish Romantics, such as Adam Mickiewicz and Józef Ignacy Kraszewski, had a profound influence on the development of the Lithuanian national identity and the awareness of the broad mass of Lithuania's rural population that they were not only part of an ethnic group but also a nation. But the most romantic, melodious, lyrical, and somewhat combative poetry of the time was that of Father Jonas Mačiulis (pen name Maironis), written in Lithuanian. In 1895, Maironis published two volumes of poetry – *Pavasario balsai* (*The Voices of Spring*) and *Jaunoji Lietuva* (*Young Lithuania*). Many of his poems became popular folk songs. National identity was also strengthened by Kudirka's poetry and his satirical stories mocking tsarist officials, as well as by the rich, realistic social prose of Julija Žymantienė (pen name Žemaitė), who belonged to the petty gentry. The illegal Lithuanian press also published fiction by writers from other nations, primarily from neighbouring countries, especially works

by Lithuanian patriots of the first half of the 19th century who wrote in Polish.

According to the 1897 census, the population in those territorial units of the Russian Empire that are in the current territory of Lithuania (excluding the Klaipėda region, which was then part of Prussia) was about 2.7 million. Ethnic Lithuanians accounted for about 1.6 million, or 58% of the population. At the time the gentry constituted 5.3% of the population in these territories and approximately 28% of the gentry identified themselves as Lithuanian. 13% of the population was Jewish, 10% Polish, and 15% Belarusian, Russian, and Ukrainian combined. About 13% of the population was urban (including small towns). The Jews were the largest ethnic group among city and town dwellers and constituted about 42% of the urban population. They were followed by the Poles – about 24%, and then the Lithuanians – about 8%. Although some attempts by Lithuanians to enter trade, business, and manufacturing occupations are recorded, their success in specific areas was modest, to say the least. For example, according to the census, there were only 14 Lithuanian tradesmen, while the number of Jewish merchants was 3,853. The population of Vilnius at the time was 155,000 (the number rose to 200,000 right before World War I), while the population of Kaunas was slightly over 70,000.

The absolute majority of the Lithuanians were peasants. Around 26,000 Lithuanians were craftsmen or industrial workers, and nearly 5,000 represented the intelligentsia: clergy, teachers, doctors, government workers, and gentry. These Lithuanian intellectuals paved the way for Lithuania to become a modern nation. Economic development was stimulated by telegraph lines that began operating in the middle of the 19th century, as well as by steamship operations on the Nemunas River. The 1860s and 1870s saw the construction of the Saint Petersburg – Warsaw railway through Lithuania; specifically, it was the line between Liepāja and Romny. Later on, the railway was extended through Kaunas to Königsberg. The first telephone lines were built in the 1880s, and the first automobiles were introduced in the beginning of the 20th century. Thousands of Lithuanians took jobs in Riga, Saint Petersburg, and Odessa, but the biggest wave of economic emigration began in 1868 to the United States of America. In 1910, 207,000 Lithuanians lived in the United States, primarily in Pennsylvania, Chicago, and New York. They were free to publish in Lithuanian (the first Lithuanian newspaper in the United States appeared in 1879), establish as-

sociations and other organizations that represented socialist and Christian democratic values, engage in amateur arts and sports, and form choruses. Lithuanian Americans provided financial support for Lithuania's cultural life and organized political events which brought attention to national discrimination in the Russian Empire.

At the end of the century, Georg Sauerwein, a German publicist and political activist, poet and polyglot of Sorbian descent, fought for the Lithuanian language in East Prussia, and wrote a national anthem for Lithuania Minor which contained the following lines: "Lithuanians we are born / Lithuanians we wish to be / We received that honour at birth / And we cannot let it perish". It immediately became popular in Lithuania Major, and Lithuanians on both sides of the Nemunas sang it, believing that indeed they would not perish.

A Transformed Lithuania Seeks Autonomy

At the beginning of the 20th century, the ethnic Lithuanian national revival made significant gains through its clandestine cultural activities. Lithuanian culture was becoming more than just folk culture. A fairly large intelligentsia encompassing the arts and humanities, the sciences, and education developed. A group of Lithuanian politicians came together voluntarily and began to create European-style political parties. A common written language became more firmly established in literature. Even the Russian press acknowledged that the Lithuanian movement was the third most powerful in the Empire (after that of the Poles and the Jews).

Two events had a significant effect on the formation of Lithuanian national awareness. One took place in the small town of Kražiai (25 km north of Raseiniai) in 1893, and resounded throughout Europe. Mounted Cossacks stormed the Kražiai church, which was being defended by the residents of the town who did not want to see it shut down. Some of them were wounded or killed, and women were raped. People dubbed the incident the "Kražiai Massacre". The brutal behaviour of the Russian government troops triggered outrage among the more sober-minded strata of Russian society, as well as a protest from the Vatican. Prominent lawyers rose up to defend the residents of Kražiai, who were being tried for resisting government orders, so the punishments meted out were not severe.

The other event took place in France. Lithuanians participated for the first time at the 1900 World's Fair in Paris (the *Exposition Universelle*). Lithuanians from Lithuania, together with their countrymen from Lithuania Minor and with considerable assistance from Lithuanian-Americans, prepared an exhibition in the ethnographic section which featured examples of Lithuanian national costumes, agricultural implements, and other items, the most important of which were samples of the Lithuanian publications that were secretly being printed in East Prussia. In this way a message was sent to the world: a country called Lithuania existed, and the tsarist government prohibited it from printing publications in its own (Latin) alphabet.

The Lithuanian national revival, which considered the tsarist regime its enemy, soon found another – Polish "Polonizers". The growing number of families speaking Lithuanian in public as well as demands for celebrating Mass in Lithuanian in Catholic churches aroused opposition among some Polish speakers. Landowners, defending themselves from what they dubbed "Lithomania" (Pol. *litwomania*), grew more and more estranged from the Lithuanian-speaking villagers, and priests unsympathetic to Lithuanian national aspirations came into serious conflict with their parishioners. In 1902, a priest named Adomas Jakštas-Dambrauskas published a booklet in Polish in which he set forth the aims and programme of the new generation of young Lithuanians, and requested that the new generation of young Lithuanian gentry also declare clearly whether they considered themselves to be Lithuanians or Poles. The Lithuanian gentry were requested to be conscious and sincere Lithuanians, to speak and pray in Lithuanian, to love their country and work for its good, to be its leaders, to look after the education and welfare of its people, in other words, to be the salt of Lithuania's earth. The proposal for the Lithuanian gentry to become part of the national revival was rejected by Poles in Vilnius with the publication of a brochure entitled *Przenigdy* (*Absolutely Never*), written under the pseudonym Dr Ludwik Czarkowski; the brochure worsened Polish-Lithuanian relations. Many of the gentry did not understand the aspirations of the Lithuanians in general, and considered cooperation with them to be dishonourable.

With revolution imminent throughout Russia, the tsarist government was forced to make concessions. The greatest victory of the Lithuanian national revival was the repeal in the spring of 1904 of the ban on Lithu-

anian publications using the Latin alphabet. Once the ban was lifted, a legal Lithuanian press quickly emerged within the country.

At the beginning of 1905, the first social democratic revolution began in the capital of Russia and quickly made its way to the cities of Lithuania as well. Strikes, demonstrations, and rallies took place. Their organizers were mainly branches of Russian and Polish socialist parties. The Social Democratic Party of Lithuania began to agitate for political change in the smaller towns and rural areas. In the spring and summer of that year, various professional organizations were established, most often on an ethnic basis. The movement soon turned to action in Lithuania's countryside in the fall. Government-appointed clerks were driven out of the districts and Russian teachers were replaced by Lithuanians at elementary schools.

When Tsar Nicholas II, frightened by the rising wave of revolution throughout Russia, issued a manifesto in late October of 1905 that pledged to recognize fundamental democratic freedoms and to organize elections to a State Duma (Parliament), Lithuanian activists decided to convene in Vilnius a large assembly of Lithuanians from every part of Lithuania. This convention was partly a reaction to the threat of radical socialist revolution, which was not an idea favoured by moderates or the Catholic Church. The idea for an assembly was suggested to Jonas Basanavičius, who had returned from emigration in Bulgaria, by Petras Vileišis, and a committee was formed to undertake the organizational work and set the agenda. The assembly, which was later named the Great Assembly (Diet) of Vilnius (Lith. *Didysis Vilniaus seimas*), took place in a municipal building in Vilnius on 4–5 December, a building that today houses the National Symphony Orchestra. It was attended by approximately 2,000 delegates from nearly all the ethnographic regions of Lithuania, representing all strata of society and all political currents and trends. Delegates came even from the more remote districts of Belarus, and from East Prussia, Russia, Poland and Latvia. Representatives of the Polish-speaking landed gentry and delegates from the Polish Socialist Party in Lithuania also participated. There were various disagreements between the more radical and the more moderate factions, but the assembly came to agreement on major principles. The culmination of the assembly was the adoption of a resolution demanding political autonomy for Lithuania, and the right to elect its own parliament (*Seimas*) in Vilnius by universal suffrage regardless of nationality, religion or gender. The new Lithuania was defined as the ethnographic Lithuanian lands,

including Užnemunė, or Suvalkija, which then was part of the Kingdom of Poland, and bordering areas if their inhabitants chose to join.

In other resolutions, people were urged to stop paying taxes, to avoid military service, and to organize local self-government. This prompted Lithuanian villages and towns to take district municipalities into their own hands. Over the course of the winter, many areas of the Lithuanian countryside were taken over by the local people. However, in the spring of 1906, as the wave of revolution subsided, the tsarist government restored the old, albeit slightly revised, order with the help of Cossacks and the army. Obviously, no one in St Petersburg gave serious consideration to the resolution on granting Lithuania political autonomy.

Post-1905 Lithuania – Resistance through Culture

Even though an institution of representative (albeit not democratically elected) government emerged in Russia after the revolution – a bicameral legislature, made up of the State Council and the State Duma, which shared legislative powers with the tsar – all executive power and constitutional legislation remained in the hands of the tsar. In the elections to the Duma, Lithuanians formed a bloc with the Jews in opposition to the landed gentry and the Polish-speakers, and elected their first parliamentarians, mainly Social Democrats. The local government model did not change. The *zemstvo* form of local government, which began to be implemented throughout much of Russia in 1864, never became established in Lithuania (or the other Baltic provinces). When the question of Polish political autonomy was raised at the State Duma, Lithuanian delegates argued that if autonomy were granted, Užnemunė, the Lithuanian part of the Kingdom of Poland in the Suwałki Governorate, should be detached from it. However, the Duma rejected autonomy for the Kingdom of Poland.

The tsarist government continued to refer to the former territory of the GDL as the Northwestern Territory, indicating that it was still considered an organic part of Russia proper. This, in turn, meant that Poles, Lithuanians, and Jews were simply considered to be ethnic minorities of the region. They were permitted to foster their own cultures provided that the tsarist administration did not consider their activities detrimental to the interests

of the empire. The official system of education was still Russian, though Lithuanian and Polish were allowed to be taught in government schools; in secondary schools they were elective subjects. Lithuanians and Poles were no longer forbidden to teach at these schools. Furthermore, individuals or organizations were now permitted to establish private schools where the primary language of instruction was Lithuanian or Polish. The majority of Lithuanian elementary schools – approximately 70 – were founded by Catholic societies. There was a private secondary school for women with instruction in Lithuanian in Užnemunė. Village children continued to be taught to read, write and count in small groups at home; this was no longer an illegal activity.

After the revolution, when it was apparent that there was no chance of obtaining political autonomy for Lithuania, Lithuanian activists (as well as their Polish counterparts) focused mainly on broadly based cultural activities that were politically oriented toward their respective visions of statehood. They hoped that sooner or later political circumstances would be favourable for the realization of their visions, basing such hopes on the possibility of a new revolution in Russia or a war in Europe.

Propaganda battles were waged among the various ideological factions (which often called themselves political parties). The factions were split not only ideologically, but also along ethnic lines, and thus the same ideological positions were represented separately in the Lithuanian and Polish communities. These separate groups maintained different positions on Lithuanian and Polish ethno-linguistic nationalism, and *a priori* considered each other's goals to be hostile and in principle illegal. The only ones who did not take sides on nationality were the marginal underground radical-leftist organizations oriented towards the communist revolution and "proletarian internationalism", a handful of intellectuals, and a small democratic group, the so-called "compatriots" (Pol. *krajowcy*), that supported the idea of restoring the GDL. The latter advocated the idea of an autonomous Lithuania within the borders of the former GDL as a multicultural state where Lithuanian, Polish and Belarusian would all have official status. If this entity became an independent state, it could form a confederation or equitable federation with Poland. Lithuanians considered the *krajowcy* to be Polish, while Polish nationalists considered them to be "inauthentic" or "completely wrong-headed" Poles. Given the mutual phobias existing at that time, the goals of the *krajowcy* were unrealizable.

Of the Lithuanian groups, the strongest were the Christian Democrats, mainly Catholic priests, who were committed to supporting the ethnic Lithuanian national revival and were able to carry on their activities through the Church, its cultural and educational organizations, and its numerous publications. They focused most of their attention on Lithuanian cultural and social activities consistent with Catholic doctrine. Together with a group of future National Unionists (Lith. *tautininkai*) clustered around the *Viltis* (*Hope*) newspaper edited by Antanas Smetona, they fought for Lithuanian-language rights in Vilnius diocesan churches. This fight often turned into brawls between the Lithuanians and the Poles. The diocese was dominated by Polish Christian Democrats, who were Polish nationalists and saw the future Polish state as covering essentially the former PLC in its entirety; they were committed to strengthening Polish patriotism and the Polish language. The Christian Democrats benefited from the fact that they demonstrated loyalty to the tsarist government, and thus the regime did not interfere in their activities.

Perhaps the Christian Democrats' greatest rival within the ethnic Lithuanian national revival movement was the liberal Lithuanian Democratic Party, which was formed in 1902 by the group that coalesced around the *Varpas* newspaper. These intellectuals promoted the separation of church and state. The Lithuanian Democratic Party's ideal was an independent and democratic Republic of Lithuania within historic Lithuanian ethnographic borders, "with a fair distribution of wealth," and linked by federal ties with neighbouring democratic states. The Democrats also published illegal publications and collaborated with the Lithuanian Social Democrats. Through Masonic lodges, they attempted to begin a dialogue about the prospects for future statehood with Polish activists who belonged to those lodges, but could not find common ground.

The Social Democratic Party of Lithuania (SDPL), the oldest party linked to the broad general ideals of the Lithuanian national revival, lost the popularity that it had achieved after the 1905 revolution and suffered the most from tsarist repressions. The Social Democrats supported the idea of Lithuanian independence, and spoke out in favour of social reforms and the equality of the Lithuanian and Polish languages.

Many social and cultural organizations as well as branches of nearly all of Poland's political parties also operated within the territory of Lithuania. The most active among Poland's parties in Lithuania were the Polish Na-

tional Democrats, whose leader Roman Dmowski believed in the Polish doctrine of "organic nationalism". In his vision of a Polish state (or an autonomous Poland within the Russian Empire), ethnic Lithuanians would have the status of a cultural minority. The position of the Polish Christian Democrats was not much different. The Polish Socialist Party, headed by Józef Piłsudski, a native of ethnic Lithuania, had a different view of Lithuania's future.

Piłsudski's supporters took a strong stand against Russia, and did not shy away from acts of terrorism. Piłsudski himself, a supporter of the restoration of the former dual Polish-Lithuanian state, imagined that duality as a federation, with Lithuania itself divided into three parts: an ethnic Lithuanian western part, a Polish-speaking central part with Vilnius and Grodno, and an eastern part with Minsk, where there would be room for the Belarusian language. Of course, Polish would be the official language throughout that trinary Lithuania. Piłsudski was not a supporter of Polonization, but he did not take seriously Lithuanian pretensions to create an independent Lithuania within its historical territory because the Lithuanian language had already largely been displaced on the peripheries of that territory, including the area where he was born. Furthermore, Yiddish-speaking Jews were the largest ethnic group in Lithuania's urban areas, and, after 1905, Polish replaced Russian as the most frequently spoken language in the streets.

Polish and Lithuanian cultural organizations existed side by side in Lithuania. Since attempts to restore the university in Vilnius failed (such attempts were made in 1905, and there was even an agreement by Lithuanian and Polish intellectuals that it would have three languages of instruction), other learned institutions were established: the Lithuanian Scientific Society (1907), whose aim was to nurture and promote Lithuanian national culture and whose hope was to develop into an Academy of Sciences in the future; and the Vilnius Friends of Science Society (1907), which united Polish-speakers, and did much to promote Vilnius as a centre of culture and learning. The initiator and chairman of the Lithuanian Scientific Society was Dr Jonas Basanavičius, who was already at that time regarded by Lithuanians as the patriarch of the nation. Both societies paid considerable attention to the past and the legacy of the GDL, but the Lithuanian Scientific Society emphasized research on the Lithuanian language and ethnic culture, and on preparing textbooks for Lithuanian schools. Both societies

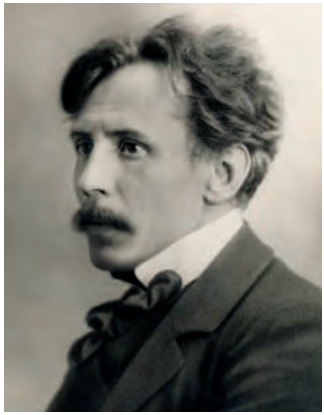
Participants of the convention of the Lithuanian Scientific Society in Vilnius in 1912. Seated fourth from the left, Dr Jonas Basanavičius. Photograph by Aleksandras Jurašaitis.

published periodical scholarly journals, and both were institutional members of each other's societies.

There were also parallel developments in the areas of fine and performing arts as well as architecture. The Lithuanians were the first to found the Lithuanian Art Society (1907) in Vilnius and to begin organizing public exhibitions. But soon, local artists who did not want to identify themselves with the goals of the ethnic Lithuanian national revival founded a separate Vilnius Art Society. Some had a hard time deciding which society to join, even though there was no prohibition against belonging to both at the same time. Among these artists was Mikalojus Konstantinas Čiurlionis (1875–1911), who is currently the most widely known Lithuanian painter and composer in the world. He studied music and art in Warsaw and Leipzig. Though Čiurlionis came from an ethnic Lithuanian environment, he did not speak Lithuanian well when he arrived in Vilnius (1907). Nevertheless, he chose to be with the Lithuanians and was one of the founders of the Lithuanian Art Society.

During this period, Lithuanian literature rose to new heights – works written in Lithuanian met both intellectual and artistic standards. The goals formulated by Bishop Antanas Baranauskas for a nascent ethnic

Lithuanian nation seemed achievable, especially if a state were to emerge that would acknowledge Lithuanians as part of its cultural heritage. In their plans for statehood, the Poles envisioned only an ethnic minority status for Lithuanians. As if "returning the favour," Lithuanians also envisioned only an ethnic minority status for Polish-speakers in the Lithuanian state. The dialogue became complicated. In the beginning of 1914, no one thought that in a few years they would have to take practical actions to implement their dreams, and that soon they would have to choose not only which society to join based on language, but Polish or Lithuanian passports.



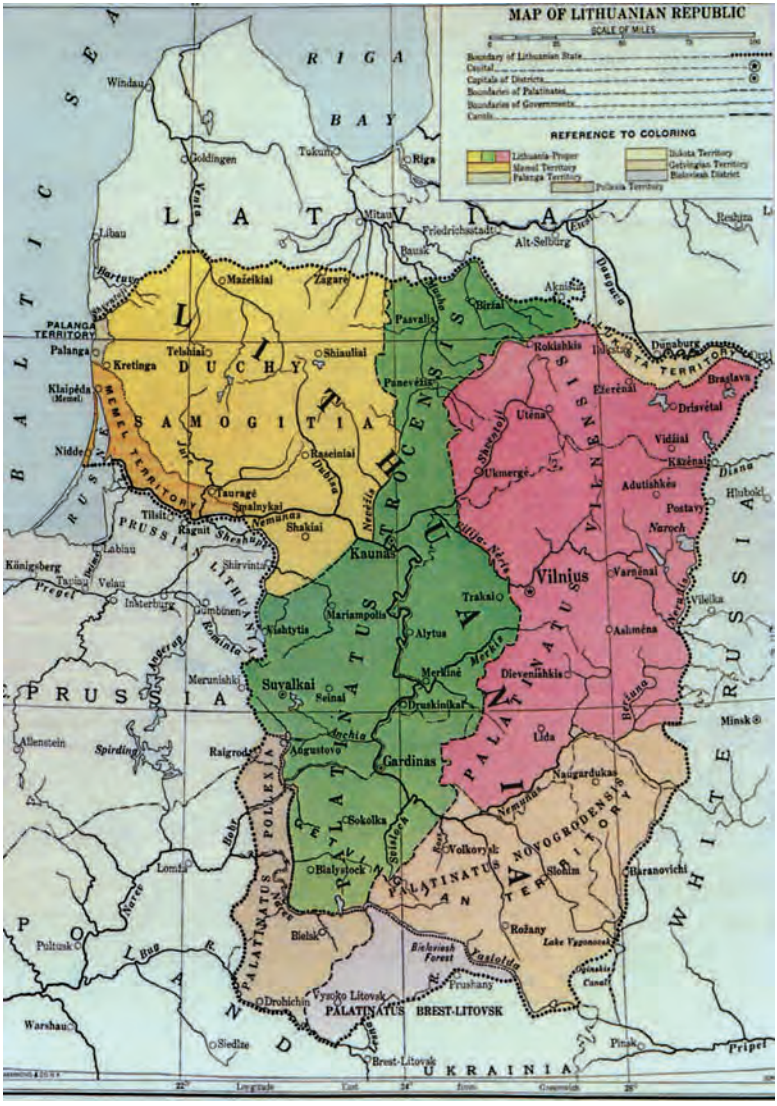
Mikalojus Konstantinas Čiurlionis. Photograph by Stanisław Filibert Fleury, 1908.

Chapter IV

RESTORATION OF THE LITHUANIAN STATE

At the beginning of the 20th century, most of the world was hardly aware of the existence of the Lithuanian nation. It was well known primarily to linguists, who studied the Lithuanian language because it had preserved many archaic features of the prehistoric Proto-Indo-European language and was thus useful for comparative philology. Many Poles considered the emergence of the Lithuanian nationalist movement to be a project of Russia's tsarist policies, designed only to split and weaken Polish strength. Later, they would hold the revival of the Lithuanian state to be just an intrigue of Germany. As independence became a real possibility during the First World War, independence-minded Lithuanians were confronted with a dilemma: what kind of Lithuania did they want? Should it be like the Grand Duchy of Lithuania (GDL) – multilingual and multicultural – or should it be a smaller Lithuanian-speaking country? They had to consider how to reconcile these views, and also how to arrive at a *modus vivendi* with the Poles, who had plans for a restored Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth and did not understand or acknowledge Lithuanian aspirations to sovereignty.

In the 20th century, Lithuania would rise again as a newly established country, having a historic link to the GDL, to be sure, but now based on ethnicity – a Lithuanian-speaking Lithuania. Like its neighbour Poland, and most other European countries at that time, Lithuania was created as a modern national state. It is not clear what it would have become had it been restored on the basis of its predecessor state – the GDL. Even the state model of 1795, when Lithuania was part of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, was complicated by the historical fact that the envisioned borders of a *Lithuania Propria* (Lithuania Proper) no longer coincided with ethnic borders, and to absorb the eastern populations that now only spoke Belarusian and Polish appeared to be an impossible task.



The territory that Lithuania initially envisioned: *Lithuania Propria*; map from Jonas Žilius's book *The Boundaries of Lithuania*, Paris, 1920.

THE STRUGGLE FOR INDEPENDENCE

Lithuania's Plans: From Autonomy to Independence

The European national movements received a new impetus on 28 June 1914, when the shots that killed Franz Ferdinand, the Archduke of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, rang out in Sarajevo. After Austria-Hungary declared war on Serbia and Russia entered the conflict on Serbia's side, Austria-Hungary and its ally Germany entered a state of war not only with Russia, but also with the other two nations of the Triple Entente – France and Great Britain. As soon as Russia raised the issue of finding a solution to the partition of Poland, in which Russia had participated together with the Austrian and Prussian empires, the Lithuanians winced. Surely the Lithuanians in the Suwałki (Lith. *Suvalkai*) governorate would not come under Polish control?

In July of 1914, in Vilnius, Jonas Basanavičius, Stasys Šilingas and Donatas Malinauskas drafted the "Lithuanian Declaration", which later became known as the "Amber Declaration". A Lithuanian member proclaimed the declaration in the Russian Duma in early August. The declaration expressed the desire of Lithuanians to unite Lithuanian lands on both sides of the Nemunas, i.e., Lithuania Major and Lithuania Minor (East Prussia), and, assuming a Russian victory in the war, requested that this united Lithuania be an autonomous region within the Russian family of nations. The Russians ignored the declaration. At about the same time, in the Prussian Landtag (parliament), the ethnic Lithuanian parliamentarian Vilius (Wilhelm) Gaigalaitis, also speaking on behalf of Lithuanians, stated that they hoped to see Lithuania Major annexed to Germany. In other words, Lithuanians on both sides of the conflict desired to see a united Lithuania at its conclusion. The idea of Lithuanian unification and autonomy spread beyond Europe. In September, it was supported by the Lithuanian Catholic Assembly that convened in Chicago, USA. Thus Lithuanian activists were beginning to coordinate their efforts to declare the ethno-political separateness of Lithuania and raise the issue of Lithuania's status, using Lithuania Minor as a bargaining chip to internationalize the issue.

Another state-modelling phase began after military operations ravaged Lithuania and it came under German occupation. In the spring of 1915,

the Germans seized the strategically important fortress of Kaunas without resistance and on 15 September marched into Vilnius. Thus all the former Polish and Lithuanian territory that had come under Russian control during the partition of 1795 now came under the control of the invading German and Austrian armies. That territory was inhabited by Poles, Lithuanians, Latvians and Belarusians. The Germans seemed to be a little uncertain about where they were, because they distributed a proclamation in Vilnius in which they referred to Vilnius as "the most beautiful pearl in the Kingdom of Poland". However, they withdrew it when the Lithuanians protested. Six months later the Germans had a better understanding of where they were.

The chancellor of Germany, Theobald von Bethmann Hollweg, declared in the German Reichstag that Germany would not return to Russia any territories from the Baltic Sea to the swamps of Volhynia, whether these territories were inhabited by Poles, Lithuanians, Germans or Latvians. The emerging political constellation aroused the interest of Lithuanians, and the resolutions of the warring parties on the Polish question presented an opportunity, through Germany, to also raise the Lithuanian question. The Germans considered Lithuania to be Russian-occupied territory, so when the front stabilized in 1915, they formed a military administration called *Ober Ost* (from *Oberbefehlshaber der gesamten Deutschen Streitkräfte im Osten* – Supreme Command of All German Forces in the East). It was headed by the generals Paul von Hindenburg and Erich Ludendorff and it used all the resources of Lithuania for German military purposes. They divided the country into districts, the borders of which changed often. In June 1916, the Lithuanian District (with its centre in Kaunas) was combined with the Vilnius District. In 1918, a Lithuanian Military Administration Authority (*Militärverwaltung Litauen*) was established. The surprising thing is that on a map the *Ober Ost* territory, which stretched south from the Baltic Sea, almost coincided in its form with the borders of the GDL in 1793–1795, when, as President Antanas Smetona put it, "it ceased to be a state."

Some of the Lithuanian intelligentsia fled to St Petersburg. Those who remained in Vilnius and Kaunas understood that Germany was planning to annex the occupied territories and to colonize and Germanize them. At a later stage in the war, German plans gravitated toward more clever attempts to create a local administration for a nominally independent state

that in reality would be dependent on Germany. But to do that the *Ober Ost* would need Lithuanian cooperation.

The pluralistic Lithuanian political body was divided into various parties and social movements, which can conditionally be divided into two main streams. On the radical left were the Social Democrats and the Democratic Party, and on the conservative right, the National Unionists and the Christian Democrats. These were not monolithic camps, as there were also various small groups with differing political views.

Both the radical and the conservative parties supported the principle of national self-determination and Lithuania's historical tradition of statehood. Their territorial aspirations were as similar as twins: the historically ethnic Lithuanian lands in the governorates of Vilnius, Kaunas, Suwałki and Grodno and part of Courland. Given that the cultural consequences of the common Polish-Lithuanian state were still extant, and Polish-speaking Lithuanians increasingly gravitated toward the Polish cultural orbit and the idea of Polish statehood and were not about to become Lithuanian-speakers, the goal of Lithuanian independence became grounded on an ethnic basis. The creators of a Lithuanian-speaking Lithuania were not offering Polish speakers any special privileges, only the right to retain their identity as a cultural minority, because most Lithuanians would hardly have approved of privileges for the wealthy landowners. Although a few estate owners, the *senlietuviai* ("Old Lithuanians," to distinguish them from the Lithuanian-speaking "New Lithuanians"), supported Lithuanian aspirations, most of them placed their hopes with Poland. Józef Piłsudski, the post-war leader of Poland, was the son of Lithuanian estate owners and called himself a Lithuanian. The estate owner Gabriel Narutowicz became president of Poland, while his brother, Stanislovas Narutavičius, became a signatory of the Lithuanian Declaration of Independence and a member of the Council of Lithuania, its first governing body.

Long discussions with the Poles about the future of Lithuania in an effort to find political compromises proved fruitless. Meanwhile, the *Ober Ost* military regime was exploiting the peasants, requisitioning their food and other supplies, imposing heavy taxes and obligations on them, and implementing a policy of Germanization in the schools. The military authorities introduced the compulsory teaching of German in the Lithuanian schools. The German Lutheran teachers that they appointed used primitive and regimented teaching methods to teach children to glorify the Kaiser.

Travel between districts was restricted, posting letters written in Lithuanian was forbidden, and the only Lithuanian newspaper permitted to be published was the censored *Dabartis* (*The Present*). The authors of public proclamations that criticized such policies were arrested and teachers were deported. Lithuanians complained of these reprisals to Berlin.

During the war a benevolent association (The Central Committee to Aid War Victims) was formed to aid the throngs of war victims who had lost their homes and livelihood. After its first chairman, Martynas Yčas, withdrew to Russia, the association was chaired by the conservative Antanas Smetona. In the spirit of compromise, Smetona invited the leaders of the left and the liberals to join the association. This community activity, interest in the progress of the war and in the post-war reconstruction unified Lithuanians with the centre of activities in Vilnius; there was general disillusionment that even autonomy was not being promised by either Russia or Germany. Lithuanians were entertaining various plans for the future, from Lithuanian autonomy to the restoration of the GDL, even to the restoration of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. However, all of these plans had a fundamental flaw: they did not guarantee Lithuania's independence. Since Lithuania's political leaders had to conform to Germany's interests during the occupation, the issue of independence provoked conflict not only with the Poles but among the Lithuanians themselves. At the Conference of Nations in Lausanne in 1916, Lithuanians for the first time announced their intention to proclaim their country's independence, but the German occupation forces in Lithuania did not permit much speculation on this theme. It began to raise the issue of Lithuania's independence only toward the end of the war, but it did not support any variants of a Polish-Lithuanian union. The *Ober Ost* kept changing the territory's borders, lessening the numbers and influence of the Poles in favour of the Lithuanians and Belarusians. Lithuanian attempts to gain more influence in the *Ober Ost* territory worsened their relations with the Poles.

When the Germans and Austrians announced plans to restore the Polish state, Lithuania's representatives began to raise the question of Lithuania. As the Germans updated their annexation and incorporation plans, they needed the support of the Lithuanians in their occupied territory. So in the summer of 1917, Lithuanians were allowed to organize a conference in Vilnius. The conference's organizational committee (Mykolas Biržiška, Petras Klimas, Antanas Smetona, Fr Juozas Stankevičius and Ju-

Presidium of the Lithuanian Conference in Vilnius (September 1917).

rgis Šaulys) chose 5–8 of the most active representatives of various social and political groups in each district to attend the conference. The Polish landowners were not specifically invited to the conference because it was organized as a Lithuanian conference, though a few attended. The Vilnius Conference took place on 18–22 September in the Vilnius City Theatre. There were 213 delegates from all of Lithuania and another 9 were co-opted by the leadership. The most numerous groups represented were priests (66), farmers (65) and members of the intelligentsia (59).

In the main resolution of the Lithuanian Conference in Vilnius, the Lithuanians described the kind of state they envisioned: "an independent, democratically organized state within ethnic boundaries, adjusted as necessary to sustain economic life." The final structure of the future state was to be determined by "a Constituent Assembly of Lithuania, convened in Vilnius and democratically elected by all the people of Lithuania". The cultural rights of ethnic minorities were to be guaranteed. There was an addendum to this resolution which read: "If Germany agrees to proclaim the state of Lithuania before the peace conference and to support the needs of Lithuania at the peace conference, then the Lithuanian Conference, bearing in mind that in normal conditions of peace the interests of Lithuania incline not so much to the east or to the south as to the west, recognizes the possibility for the future state of Lithuania to enter into a certain rela-

tionship, still to be determined, with Germany, without harming its own independent development." East, south, and west in this context referred to Lithuania's neighbours – Russia, Poland, and Germany, respectively. This carefully balanced passage was a response to German demands to declare loyalty to Germany. It did not please the Germans and they did not allow publication of the resolution.

The conference delegates elected a 20-person Council of Lithuania which started work on 24 September as the executive organ of the people of Lithuania. Its chairman was the lawyer and Lithuanian newspaper editor Antanas Smetona, who was expected to be able to bridge the gap between the radical and conservative factions of the council. The council did not have any real executive powers, therefore it took on the difficult role of being an intermediary between the Lithuanian nation and the *Ober Ost*, trying to make use of the differences that were coming to the fore in Germany between the Kaiser, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Reichstag centre deputies (the Catholics), in order to disrupt plans for the annexation of Lithuania.

One of the most important discussion topics was the geographic boundaries of the future Lithuania. The Bern Conference of 2–10 November 1917, which was organized by Lithuanian activists living in Europe and the United States and was attended by the entire Presidium of the Council of Lithuania (Antanas Smetona, Steponas Kairys, Jurgis Šaulys), resolved that the territory of Lithuania be determined on ethnographic grounds within the area of *Lithuania Propria*: the governorates of Kaunas and Suwałki, the districts of Białystok, Grodno, Słonim and Wołkowysk, almost the entire governorate of Vilnius (apart from some Orthodox districts) and also the district of Ilūkste in Courland as far as the Daugava River. The conference also intended to demand the port of Liepāja, but omitted mention of German Klaipėda (Memel) for tactical reasons. In general, the territorial plans changed as the international situation changed. No one could really say what size the future country might turn out to be.

Discussions about the future of Lithuania were held wherever there were larger concentrations of Lithuanian emigrants. Around 300,000 Lithuanian war refugees and work migrants were scattered all over the huge territory of Russia. In St Petersburg and Voronezh, they established Lithuanian centres with Lithuanian newspapers and secondary schools, which prepared young people to return to Lithuania. The Russian Revolution and

the overthrow of the Tsar created better conditions for Lithuanian activity, but these cataclysmic events were also politically divisive. At a Lithuanian assembly held in March 1917 in Petrograd, the left-wingers, full of revolutionary euphoria, spoke in favour of a future Lithuania within "Russia's federation of free states". This prompted the conservative majority, which was clearly in favour of full Lithuanian independence, to walk out.

When America entered the war against Germany in April 1917, the more than 300,000 people of Lithuanian descent living in the United States (mostly in Chicago, New York and Pennsylvania) became active proponents of an independent Lithuania. They had a well-developed organizational structure (societies and associations), a prolific Lithuanian press, and cultural organizations. President Woodrow Wilson's proclamation of his "14 Points", setting forth the principle of national self-determination in its recommendations for a post-war order in Europe, provided an opportunity to raise the Lithuania question. Lithuanian-Americans organized support for war victims, and they asked President Wilson to declare a special day for Lithuanian war victims on 1 November 1916, during which $200,000 was collected for their benefit. Lithuanian-Americans provided financial support to the Lithuanian Information Bureau in Lausanne (staffed by Juozas Gabrys-Paršaitis and others) and to publications about Lithuania in foreign languages, in which they raised the issue of independence for Lithuania. In March 1918, the most influential American–Lithuanian Catholic organizations and the National Union (*Tautininkai*) demanded independence for Lithuania at their conventions. Representatives from these organizations also took part in several Lithuanian conferences in Switzerland. Coordination between Lithuanian centres abroad and Lithuania's organizations improved.

Act of February 16, 1918

At the end of 1917, as Germany prepared for separate peace negotiations with Soviet Russia, it pressed the Council of Lithuania to proclaim a Lithuanian state united with Germany. The *Ober Ost*, headquartered in Kaunas, provided a draft of the required resolution to the council, which amended it slightly but endorsed it and returned it to the military administration on 11 December. The first part of the resolution, referencing the right to national self-determination and the resolutions adopted at

Council of Lithuania in 1918: Dr Jonas Basanavičius, fifth from left in first row; Antanas Smetona, sixth from left in first row.

the Vilnius Lithuanian Conference, stated that Lithuania was an independent country with its capital in Vilnius, and that all previous political ties to other countries were annulled.

In the second part of the resolution, however, the Council acquiesced to Germany's demand and declared that it was in favour of "a permanent, strong union of the Lithuanian state with the German state", which would be enacted through four conventions (military, transport, finances, and customs). There was no mention of a constituent assembly. Germany benefited from this resolution at the Brest-Litovsk (now Brest, Belarus) peace negotiations, to which representatives of the Council of Lithuania were not invited.

There was, however, one positive outcome. The December 11 resolution created a scandal. There were negative reactions from Lithuanians in the United States and in Russia, which in turn caused a rift in the council. At the end of January 1918, the radicals Steponas Kairys, Stanislovas Narutavičius, Jonas Vileišis and Mykolas Biržiška withdrew from the council to protest its policy of appeasement. Since Germany did not recognize Lithuania even on the basis of the December 11 resolution, the disillusioned council leaders began to seek a compromise with the leftists. A text was drafted that was mutually agreeable to both sides, and in Vilnius, on 16 February 1918, the Council of Lithuania passed a new resolution,

in effect, a declaration of independence. They declared the restoration of an independent, democratic Lithuanian state with Vilnius as its capital, based on the acknowledged right of nations to self-determination, and the termination of all state ties which formerly bound Lithuania to other nations. The resolution further declared that the foundations of the Lithuanian state and its relations with other countries were to be finally determined by a constituent assembly, to be elected democratically by all inhabitants.

The Act of February 16 proclaims the "restoration" of independence, a clear reference to its historical antecedent, the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. By using such terms as "restoration" and "re-establishment", Lithuanians wanted to stress that Lithuania's statehood was distinct from Poland's. After all, one could be restoring not only the Grand Duchy of Lithuania but also the Kingdom of Mindaugas. Much would depend on international conditions, but it was clear that the new Lithuania was to be a parliamentary democracy.

The Act of February 16 expressed the hopes and aspirations of the Lithuanian people. It became the nation's symbol of freedom and sovereignty and February 16 is observed as Lithuanian Independence Day. The act was a clear statement of where the council was leading Lithuania. On 23 March in Berlin, a delegation of the council, led by Smetona, conveyed the contents of the act to the chancellor of Germany, Georg von Hertling. That same day, Kaiser Wilhelm II announced Germany's recognition of Lithuania's independence, but with the proviso that close ties be established between Lithuania and Germany, as stipulated in the December 11 resolution.

The question of whether Lithuania should become a constitutional monarchy remained on the agenda. The council struggled nervously with the German military administration in Kaunas and Berlin over plans to join Lithuania in a personal union with Saxony or Prussia. In order to block such ideas, on 13 July 1918, the council's conservatives and monarchists, backed by Matthias Erzberger, leader of the Catholic-centre faction in the Reichstag, invited the Duke of Württemberg, Wilhelm von Urach, to assume the throne of Lithuania as King Mindaugas II. Even that, however, did not enhance the prospects for Lithuania's sovereignty, since German authorities refused to acknowledge the validity of the election. Moreover, the council's leftists protested that the right-wingers had usurped the people's rights. After Germany's fortunes in the war changed, the council rescinded the election on 2 November 1918.

New opportunities presented themselves when both empires – the Russian and the German – suffered defeat in the war, and when revolutions broke out in both countries. The council worked more persistently to gain authority over concrete spheres of public life and prepared to take over the government. It sent protests concerning the requisitioning carried out by the Germans and made arrangements for prisoners of war to be returned from Germany and Austria, and for Lithuanians to be repatriated from Russia. By January 1922, 195,000 people had returned to Lithuania.

On 2 November 1918, the council adopted an interim constitution, which designated the Council of Lithuania as the nation's legislative body, while the presidium of the council (consisting of chairman Antanas Smetona and vice-chairmen Justinas Staugaitis and Stasys Šilingas), together with a cabinet of ministers, were to form the executive branch of the government. With the approval of the new German chancellor, Max von Baden, the council invited history professor Augustinas Voldemaras to form a cabinet. This cabinet began work on 11 November 1918. The flamboyant Augustinas Voldemaras, who also became the minister for foreign affairs, astonished everyone by announcing that he was not planning to create a Lithuanian army because Lithuania was not preparing to go to war with anyone – it would be enough to have a militia.

But by 23 November, Voldemaras was forced to proclaim a mobilization. The Russian Bolsheviks, infused with zeal for world revolution, planned to carry the revolution to Poland and then Germany. Red Army divisions were sent to chase the retreating Germans. On 3 November 1918, Bolshevik Russia annulled the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, which had ceded the Baltic States to Germany, and began an outright military and political battle "for the liberation of Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Belarus and Ukraine from German occupation". Backed only by Red Army troops, the handful of Lithuanian Bolsheviks that there were issued a manifesto on 16 December, declaring the establishment of Soviet Lithuania. A week later, in a decree signed by Vladimir Lenin, Soviet Russia recognized Soviet Lithuania.

Lithuanians in general, however, mistrusted Soviet Russia and did not support the Bolsheviks. The problem for the Lithuanians was that Lithuania had no army with which to defend itself, and in December 1918, as the Red Army drew nearer to Vilnius, the government headed by Voldemaras still had no fighting force. On 21 December 1918, Smetona hurriedly departed for Berlin, where he asked for a loan of 100 million marks in order

to purchase armaments. Germany supplied arms to the newly forming Lithuanian army and, at the insistence of the Entente allies, Germany was allowed to send its own troops to help stop the advance of Bolshevism. The new government of Mykolas Sleževičius, which had retreated from Vilnius to Kaunas, quickly began to build the Lithuanian armed forces. The first Lithuanian military units, assisted by volunteer units from Saxony, entered into armed combat against the Red Army, and they finally halted its progress on the Kaunas–Alytus front.

Gradually the Council of Lithuania earned its critics' esteem. Leftists had criticized the council for being pro-German, but they, the Poles, and even the Entente had to acknowledge that under difficult circumstances and much external pressure, the Council of Lithuania had managed to manoeuvre among obstacles and raise the question of independence for Lithuania to the fore, managed to free itself from German political dictates, and managed to quickly establish a national government as well as local administrative units.

The Treaty of Versailles

Unlike Poland, Lithuania was not an official member of the Paris Peace Conference that began in the beginning of 1919, so the Lithuanian delegation could only operate behind the scenes. The Lithuanian delegation was led by Voldemaras. Other delegation members included the Lithuanian Jewish representative Simon Rosenbaum, the Belarusian representative Dominyk Semashko and many Lithuanians from the United States. The language editor was the French poet Oscar Milosz, descendant of an old Lithuanian (GDL) family. The delegation drew the conference's attention to the issue of recognizing Lithuania through memorandums, articles and statements to various committees of the conference. This was the first time that a Lithuanian delegation was not just discussing these issues with other Lithuanians, but was acting on behalf of Lithuania at a very important international forum, and creating the conditions for independence. The delegation had been instructed to base its arguments on the ethnic principle when discussing border issues, while insisting on essential economic correctives, such as having an outlet to the sea at Klaipėda or Liepāja; to stress that Vilnius was the capital of Lithuania; and to lobby for Lithuanian admission to the League of Nations.

Vilnius 1916 – the epicentre of the Lithuanian-Polish dispute. Photograph by Jan Bułhak.

The delegation argued that Lithuania did not wish to belong to Poland or Russia, that it was an historic country. It sought friends and allies. It talked to the Estonians and Latvians, as well as the Poles. It tried to draw its borders to include the Suwałki triangle. In general, it performed an informational and propaganda role. The many Polish supporters of Roman Dmowski and Józef Piłsudski tried to keep Lithuania as part of Poland, so in its note of 24 March 1919, the Lithuanian delegation stated that Poland had always exploited Lithuania and that the political union with Poland in the 16th century led to internal chaos in Lithuania. The representatives of the Russian White Guards remained silent on the subject. Other developments, however, helped Lithuania to get the conference's attention.

The Lithuanian delegation in Paris breathed a sigh of relief when they received news that the advance of the Red Army in Lithuania had been stopped and that the situation had stabilized. At a meeting of the Council of Lithuania on 4 April 1919, Antanas Smetona, himself a member of the National Union, was elected President of Lithuania because he could unite the fractious left, the liberals and the Christian Democrats and thereby guarantee political stability.

By the end of June, the Lithuanian army had about 6,000 men and it was growing steadily. It lacked officers, so officer training began in Kaunas. Volunteers proudly and enthusiastically joined the army, and soon there were

about 12,000 of them. They were promised plots of land for their service. Military action against the Reds resulted in their expulsion from Lithuania in the summer of 1919. In the autumn, the Lithuanian forces defeated the hybrid army of the so-called Bermondtians, a combined force of Russians and Germans commanded by the Ussuri Cossack Pavel Bermondt-Avalov and formally reporting to the Russian White General Alexander Kolchak. The weapons seized from them greatly increased Lithuania's military arsenal.

The attempts to get Lithuania recognized, however, were not moving forward. Many doors were slammed shut on the Lithuanians because France supported the idea of a Greater Poland stretching "from sea to sea" (from the Baltic Sea to the Black Sea), especially in the event of the disintegration of Russia. The idea of a federated Poland and Lithuania was also not coming together. The best that the Lithuanians could expect from the Poles was an independent Lithuania within much narrower borders. Since the Poles were ignoring Lithuania's interests, the Lithuanians stood in unwavering opposition to any offer made by the Poles. The discussions went on, counteroffers were made, but the Polish delegation rejected all of them. There was no agreement on Vilnius or who should control eastern Lithuania. The Lithuanians claimed that eastern Lithuania was their historical territory, while the Poles claimed that the residents of the Vilnius region mostly spoke Polish and that Vilnius was a Polish city. Since prior to the 20th century neither side had denied that Vilnius was the historical capital of the GDL, Lithuanians persistently repeated the historical arguments.

Piłsudski argued for Polish occupation of Vilnius on the grounds of self-determination for local Polish-speakers and the necessity to continue the fight against the Bolsheviks. Lithuania requested that the Entente powers draw a demarcation line between Polish and Lithuanian troops, and such a line (the "Marshal Foch line") was drawn on 18 June 1919, but the Poles ignored it. Adhering to the principle of the indivisibility of Russia, the Entente avoided recognizing the new nations. The Lithuanians also made some mistakes. Without consulting anyone, Augustinas Voldemaras, when answering a question in June from British representative James Simpson concerning Lithuania's position on a federation with Russia, replied that "Lithuania could join a federation with Russia on more or less the same basis as Bavaria in the German federation". Dumbfounded, the Lithuanian government in Kaunas quickly issued a statement that this was only Voldemaras's personal opinion.

The aspiration of the 19th-century Lithuanian nationalist movement was for all Lithuanian lands to be united, even though East Prussia, known as Lithuania Minor to the Lithuanians, had never been part of the GDL. At Versailles, however, the Lithuanian delegation raised the question of the transfer to Lithuania of East Prussian territory, where 100,000 Lithuanians lived alongside half a million Germans, and the issue of Lithuania's access to the Baltic Sea at Klaipėda (Ger. Memel). Since it had lost the war, Germany did not protest too vociferously, believing that this way it would reduce the intrigues of the allies of the Triple Entente. Indeed, Article 28 of the Treaty of Versailles delimited boundaries separating the Klaipėda territory from Germany, putting it under the interim control of the allies. In a statement to the Germans, Georges B. Clemenceau explained that by doing this the allies were not acting against any nation's right to self-determination, since the Klaipėda region "had always been Lithuanian", and the port of Klaipėda was Lithuania's only exit to the sea. The French were granted the right to administer the Klaipėda region. This arrangement left open the possibility of Lithuania claiming the territory once Lithuania's statehood was recognized. Therefore close ties with East Prussia's Lithuanians were cultivated.

In Paris, Lithuania also had to answer questions about its internal politics, and to refute accusations that the Council of Lithuania had engaged in pro-German politics. It promised to give broad cultural autonomy to the Jews and other ethnic minorities and to undertake agrarian reforms. At home, a destructive plot was foiled: in August 1919 the Lithuanian intelligence agency arrested 200 members of the Polish Military Organization (*Polska Organizacja Wojskowa*), which had been planning a coup and the formation of a pro-Polish government. This event greatly diminished any remaining Lithuanian sentiment for a federation with Poland. Also successfully foiled was a planned coup in Kaunas by the Bermondtians. The regiments of volunteers of the Lithuanian army that were formed on the battlefield and the partisans who participated in the battles for Lithuania's independence lost 1,444 men, but they succeeded in defending the country and forcing out the invading armies.

In Paris, Lithuania succeeded in securing political support from Britain, material support from the United States of America and military support from France. Some foreign army officers were recruited to serve in Lithuania and a military brigade of American-Lithuanians began to be

formed. Although many similar ideas were never implemented due to a shortage of funds, they made a good impression on the allies. At the insistence of the Lithuanian delegation, French, British, American and Entente Supreme Council military missions made visits to Lithuania. They were instrumental in raising Lithuanian hopes for achieving independence, and supplied the allies with objective information about the situation in Lithuania.

When the British took the initiative in supporting Lithuania, joyful mass demonstrations took place to thank them. News was received on 26 September 1919 that Great Britain had officially extended *de facto* recognition to Lithuania, and thousands of people gathered in Kaunas in front of the town hall. Newspaper reports wrote that Kaunas had not seen such crowds in five centuries. Airplanes flew past in the sky hauling the tricolour Lithuanian flag. People rejoiced and President Smetona greeted the crowds from a balcony. In the remaining months of 1919, the Lithuanian state was recognized *de facto* by Norway, Latvia, and Finland and in 1920 by France (11 May) and Poland (4 July).

Peace Treaty of 12 July 1920 with Soviet Russia

Lithuania found itself at the juncture of the spheres of interest of the two countries that lost the war: Germany and Russia. The restored Polish state stepped into the breach, hoping to fill the newly created power vacuum in Eastern Europe. Western countries, wanting to create a *cordon sanitaire* between Russia and Germany, looked favourably on Poland's plans; however, Lithuania saw Poland's plans as a threat to its own borders and its existence as an independent state. Indeed, as they fought the Bolsheviks, which the Entente powers encouraged Poland and also Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia to do, Poland seized Vilnius and part of eastern Lithuania

Lithuania had to do battle on several fronts, since Russia had not abandoned its claims to the legacy of the GDL nor to Lithuania as part of that legacy. During the Russian civil war, however, pressed by the armies of the Whites, Soviet Russia took the initiative and, in September of 1919, made an offer to Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia to begin peace negotiations. Thus, in effect, Russia extended *de facto* recognition to those countries. In the beginning of 1920, Lithuania agreed to commence negotiations, as they

thought this would strengthen their position vis-à-vis the Poles. The Lithuanian delegation, led by Tomas Naruševičius, arrived in Moscow in May 1920 and immediately demanded the recognition of the restored Lithuanian state as the successor state of the GDL, but the Soviets, led by Adolf Joffe, treated Lithuania as a new political entity and agreed to recognize Lithuania only on the basis of the right to national self-determination.

Article 1 of the new peace treaty was nonetheless favourable to Lithuania, with Russia agreeing to renounce any rights to Lithuania for all time as well as recognizing its independence and sovereignty. Territorial questions were also solved favourably. Lithuanians laid claim to the former Russian governorates of Vilnius, Kaunas, Suwałki and Grodno, which traditionally had been referred to by Russian governments as Lithuanian. Even though some of that territory, including Vilnius, was already controlled by Poland, Joffe agreed to assign to Lithuania not just Vilnius, but also most of the other territories Lithuania claimed, including Grodno and Lida, where there were few Lithuanians. The ceded territory was quite similar in size to that of Lithuania in 1795. In return, however, Joffe requested that Lithuania enter a military alliance with Soviet Russia. The Lithuanians informed the British of this development, hoping that the British would help lessen Poland's appetite for Vilnius, but the French neutralized these attempts. Negotiating further for more territory in the east – basing their arguments on the predominance of the Catholic faith in that region and on ethnographic and historical data – the Lithuanian negotiators acceded to another condition proposed by Joffe, namely, to let the record state that Lithuania and Soviet Russia "had never been in a state of war" (which sounded paradoxical, because the document being drafted was a peace treaty). Lithuania received compensation of three million gold roubles and promises that they would be able to log some Russian forests and to take back Lithuanian archives that had been removed to Moscow. Lithuania took a risk signing the treaty, because they believed that in the event the Whites were victorious over the Reds in the civil war, Lithuania would be given to either Russia or Poland. In general, Lithuania's Peace Treaty of 12 July 1920 with Soviet Russia was a big win for Lithuanian diplomacy as it cemented relations with Russia and strengthened its hand with Poland. Nor could the Western countries ignore the treaty.

The treaty, however, had a weak spot: the Soviets inserted an addendum to Article 2, saying that any passage of Russian troops through Lithu-

anian territory during Russia's war with Poland would not be considered a "hostile act" against Lithuania or a breach of the treaty. Since Polish troops were in control of Vilnius and it was in the Lithuanian interest to have them driven out, Lithuania reluctantly agreed to this provision although it ostensibly violated their declared neutrality in the Polish-Russian conflict. This enabled the Red Army to occupy Vilnius on 14 July 1920 and for Russian troops to transit through the city on their way to the Polish front. The Poles interpreted this as a failure to support them in a united front against the Bolsheviks. This was the price Lithuania paid for the recognition of Vilnius as Lithuanian.

There was another development that might have provided an alternative to the peace treaty with Moscow on the Vilnius question. When Polish forces came under increasing Russian pressure and were forced to retreat, at the conference of 5–16 July 1920 at Spa, Belgium, the Great Powers pressured Poland to return Vilnius to Lithuania and on July 10 Poland said it would comply and withdraw its forces. This was a unique opportunity for Lithuania to regain its capital with Entente assistance and Poland's cooperation, but the Polish troops were in no hurry to hand over Vilnius to the Lithuanians. They had only agreed to do so because they were suffering losses to the Red Army; indeed, the Poles used force to prevent the Lithuanians from moving into Vilnius. The Red Army cavalry corps, however, captured Vilnius on July 14. The Lithuanians entered Vilnius on July 15, and in light of the treaty with Moscow they were able to persuade the Russians to withdraw. Thus Vilnius was taken over by the Lithuanians, as the Great Powers had intended.

Of course, the peace treaty signed in Moscow would not have been worth anything if Poland had not defeated the Russian Bolsheviks, because the latter were intensively preparing for a coup in Lithuania in August 1920. About 2,000 saboteurs with false Lithuanian documents were sent from the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic into Lithuania. They smuggled in arms and established arsenals for them in Kaunas and other cities. They recruited local residents. It was only the Red Army's defeat near Warsaw that caused the Bolsheviks to cancel the putsch. Thus Lithuania survived, formed an army of 30,000 men, defended itself and began to run its own affairs.

The Vilnius Question

Being militarily weak, Lithuania was unable to unite all ethnic Lithuanian lands, where Lithuanians were still in the majority. Lithuania lost Sejny (Lith. *Seinai*) and Puńsk (Lith. *Punskas*) in military clashes with Poland. The struggle against Poland took on not just a territorial but also a social aspect. In September 1920, Prime Minister Mykolas Sleževičius stated in the Seimas that "the Poles are attacking us because our estate owners invited their legions to Lithuania to help them continue to exploit our people and to defend their estates. All able-bodied men need to take up arms".

The role of Sleževičius in the battles for independence is exceptional because he managed to achieve political consensus, consolidate the national government and bring local governments under central control. He invited ethnic minorities to join in the fight against the invaders and that is why there were Jewish and Belarusian volunteers in the Lithuanian army. Lithuanians rejected the Bolshevik idea of class warfare. Nonetheless, Sleževičius stressed that Lithuanians were peasants or the children of peasants, that the land of the Polish estate owners whose children joined the Polish army would be confiscated and parcelled out to landless peasants and small farmers. That is why the majority of inhabitants supported the government.

While Poland was losing to the Red Army, Lithuania took advantage of the opportunity to occupy the ethnic Lithuanian lands around Suwałki (Lith. *Suvalkai*) and Sejny that were abandoned by the Poles. After the Red Army's defeat in mid-August, military activity between Poland and Lithuania in these regions intensified, and the towns changed hands several times. At the urging of the League of Nations, which had earlier drawn a demarcation line leaving Vilnius in Lithuanian hands, a ceasefire was established and Polish-Lithuanian negotiators sat down in Suwałki to draw up a peace treaty. On 7 October 1920 the Lithuanian and Polish delegations at Suwałki signed a temporary peace treaty which established a demarcation line between the two armies and left Vilnius in Lithuanian territory. Two days later, however, on 9 October 1920, Polish General Lucjan Żeligowski and his troops, ostensibly defying Warsaw's orders, marched into Vilnius and declared the creation of the Republic of Central Lithuania (*Republika Litwy Środkowej*). In fact, the so-called "Żeligowski mutiny" was planned and

Lithuanian artillery positioned against Polish troops in a battle near Giedraičiai, 1920.

executed with the full knowledge of Polish chief of state Józef Piłsudski, to create the impression that it was a local uprising and to avoid censure by the Western powers. Żeligowski's forces were welcomed by crowds of Poles in Vilnius. The League of Nations proved powerless to reverse the *fait accompli*, and Lithuania had all it could do to stop any further advances by the Żeligowski forces into Lithuanian territory. It took the Lithuanian army until the middle of November to reorganize and put an end to the Polish advance in battles at Širvintos and Giedraičiai.

The Entente architects of the post-war European order envisioned that Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, and Finland, under Polish leadership, would form a reliable buffer zone against Bolshevism. Lithuania, however, only partly fit into this scheme, because its desire to regain Vilnius led it to have dealings with revisionist countries, in spite of the fact that revisionism posed a threat to Lithuania's independence. Of course, Lithuanians became "revisionists" only by necessity. At first an effort was made (especially by Foreign Minister Voldemaras) to enlist German or Soviet Russian assistance in standing up to Warsaw, but these countries showed little interest in doing so. Lithuania still sought Western support, but that proved ineffective. Lithuania's dealings with Russia were based on its opposition to Poland over the Vilnius question. This suited the Russians, who were interested in dividing and conquering, and gaining influence in the region that way. Lithuania understood the Soviet

regime's real intentions, however, including the danger of becoming a Soviet satellite. Therefore it hoped to get assistance from Germany, and it occasionally did.

On 22 September 1921, Lithuania was admitted into the League of Nations, before the major Western powers had granted Lithuania *de jure* recognition. Within a short time, however, the Vatican, the United States, Spain, the Netherlands and the Scandinavian countries recognized Lithuania *de jure*. On 20 December 1922, the four Entente countries – France, England, Italy and Japan – followed suit. It had not been an easy road, but Lithuania finally became a fully fledged nation of Europe. Thus the historic partitions of the GDL had culminated in this – only the Lithuanians were able to establish a nation state, the other lands of the GDL were divided between Poland and Soviet Russia. Lithuania had signed its first treaties as a nation state and was recognized as such by others: the miracle of independence had occurred. Lithuania had managed to defend itself against the Bolsheviks. Its neighbours – Poland, Finland, Latvia and Estonia – also successfully defended their independence.

Lithuania's foreign policy was dominated by two major territorial problems: the questions of Vilnius and Klaipėda. Because of these territorial problems, Lithuania played a more important role in European politics than would have been expected, given its size. In 1921, the thinking of the Western powers was to resolve the Vilnius question and the continuing dispute between Lithuania and Poland by means of a federation. Warsaw was not against it, but a federation did not suit the Lithuanians: what, then, had been the point of fighting for independence? As the idea of a federation became popular in Western capitals, Lithuania was unable to offer an alternative solution. Former Belgian foreign minister Paul Hymans became the mediator in talks with Poland. He wanted to create a federation that would serve the interests of both Lithuania and Poland, as well as contribute to peace in Europe.

Lithuania's chief negotiator, Ernestas Galvanauskas, was given broad authority to satisfy Poland's economic interests, to guarantee Poland an outlet to the Baltic Sea, and to agree to conventions, including military, as long as Vilnius was returned to Lithuania. Senior Polish negotiator Szymon Askenazy wanted to deal with the concept of federation, but without any reference to Vilnius. Lithuanians tried to steer clear of the federation principle, wondering, understandably, how two million Lithuanians could

survive in a sea of 28 million Poles, but they agreed to negotiate, as long as Warsaw would recognize Vilnius as Lithuania's capital.

Over three weeks, Hymans prepared a plan for a Lithuanian federal state, modeled on the Swiss state, and consisting of two autonomous cantons – Kaunas and Vilnius. Lithuania and Poland would coordinate their foreign policy and draw up military and economic conventions. Both parties agreed to accept the plan as "a basis for discussions". In the summer of 1921, the Council of the League of Nations adopted a resolution supporting the Hymans plan. In September, Hymans adjusted the plan in Lithuania's favour, giving the Vilnius region the status of "autonomous region" instead of "canton". This pleased neither party to the conflict, but neither one wanted to be blamed for the failure of negotiations.

In Lithuania, the diplomatic corps was supportive of the Hymans plan, but it was opposed by all the political parties, the military leadership, and the Riflemen's Union (*Šaulių sąjunga*). There were even threats of a coup d'état. The plan was seen as a Polish Trojan horse. German and Russian diplomats urged that the plan be abandoned. On 15 November in Kaunas, a bomb exploded on the window sill of negotiator Galvanauskas's bedroom. He sustained multiple wounds but survived. The murder attempt was never investigated and the guilty parties were never found, but the plans for a Polish-Lithuanian federation fell apart. On 12 January 1922, the Secretary General of the League of Nations notified the council that both Poland and Lithuania had rejected the Hymans plan and declared that this meant the failure of the procedure of conciliation. The inability to successfully resolve the Vilnius question was one of the failures of the League of Nations, proving it powerless to enforce its decisions.

The Poles, seeing how Lithuania was weakening the economic clout of the Polish gentry (during the war of independence, the requisitioning of horses, stock feed, and food supplies was mostly carried out at the expense of Polish estate owners) and how their landholdings were being reduced, did not wait any longer. Determined to end all debate on the Vilnius question, the Poles held elections to a Sejm (parliament) in the Lithuanian territory occupied by General Lucjan Żeligowski, the so-called "Republic of Central Lithuania," on 6–8 January 1922. The vote was overwhelmingly in favour of the annexationists. The Vilnius region was to become a part of Poland. But the Military Control Commission of the League of Nations that observed these elections reported "serious doubts" about the outcome

given the fact that the Lithuanians, the Jews and a large part of the Belarusians officially boycotted the elections, that the elections were carried out under military occupation, and that the Polish authorities controlled the process. The commission concluded that the elected assembly could not be considered "a true and sincere expression" of the entirety of the region's population. When the Sejm convened on February 3, it considered only one issue – the relationship of the Vilnius region to the Polish state. The delegates voted overwhelmingly in favour of annexation; only eight of the 106 deputies favoured a federal solution of the Vilnius question. Despite frantic appeals by the Lithuanian government to Geneva, Poland formally annexed the Vilnius region. Lithuania was left in a situation of "neither war nor peace".

The decision of 15 March 1923 by the Conference of Ambassadors (a body of the League of Nations) to leave Lithuania's historic capital city Vilnius under Polish control came in response to Ernestas Galvanauskas's request that the conference make a ruling about Poland's eastern border. The conference interpreted this request in the way they wished to interpret it, as if Lithuania were requesting confirmation of the annexation of Vilnius by Poland, and thus ratified Poland's border with Soviet Russia according to the 1921 Treaty of Riga, recognizing the new demarcation line drawn by the League of Nations on February 3 as the official border between Lithuania and Poland, with Vilnius remaining on the Polish side. To the surprise of Poland, Lithuania categorically refused to acknowledge the validity of this ruling, whereas Poland and the Western countries understood that the Vilnius question was now settled. This created indescribable tensions between Lithuania and Poland along the demarcation line. The border was closed: there was no train traffic, no postal service between the two countries until 1938, by which time fairly large birch trees were growing on the highway. Probably in Europe at that time there were no two greater enemies than Poland and Lithuania.

The Polish seizure of Vilnius ended all discussions about what kind of state Lithuania should be – the historical multinational one or a national ethnic one, with the latter now the only course that appeared to guarantee survival. The lingering threat of absorption by Poland created a siege mentality in the Lithuanians, strengthening their Lithuanian nationalism. Anti-Polish feelings gradually took on an almost religious fervour. This defensive position influenced Lithuanian foreign policy. In that respect,

Lithuania was not much different from other European nations at that time, except that Lithuanian nationalism was not expansionist, it was directed at repelling its expansionist neighbours.

The Constituent Assembly of Lithuania and its Decisions

During World War I, Lithuania's physical and material resources were exhausted. Lithuanians had fought in the armies of Germany and the United States and about 11,000 Lithuanians were killed fighting in the Russian army. Russian and German military actions devastated the country. As they evacuated, the Russians took with them 160 industrial plants. The *Ober Ost* did not behave any better. The wars of independence also took their toll. In Lithuania's first year of statehood, the major source of state income was the export of linen and forest products. As Lithuania began to consolidate its positions in all of its territories, it turned its attention to the structure of the national government. Since the battles for independence went on for so long, the elections to the Constituent Assembly of Lithuania (*Steigiamasis seimas*) were held only in mid-April of 1920. The right to vote was given to all Lithuanian citizens over the age of 21, regardless of their religious affiliation, ethnicity or gender. Unlike France and many other European countries, women had the right to vote in Lithuania, as did military service members.

Voter turnout was high in the April 14–15 elections of 1920. They were won by the Christian Democratic bloc, which consisted of three parties: the Christian Democratic Party of Lithuania (CDPL), the Lithuanian Farmers' Union (LFU) and the Lithuanian Labour Federation (LLF). They won 59 seats. In a Catholic country this result was no surprise, particularly since the Catholic Church and its clergy were outspokenly anti-Polish and, more importantly, promised to nationalize the estates of the large landowners or appropriate some of their land and distribute land to the poor. The left-wing Peasants' Populist bloc, which later became the Lithuanian Peasants' Union (LPU), won 29 seats. The Lithuanian Social Democratic Party (LSDP) came in third with 12 seats. Ethnic minorities were represented by 6 Jews, 3 Poles and 1 German, and 2 members were independent, making a total of 112 representatives, of whom five were women. On May 15 they gathered together in the Kaunas city theatre to attend the first ses-

sion of the Constituent Assembly. The original plan was to elect about 100 additional representatives from the Vilnius region and nine from Lithuania Minor. Elections did not take place in those areas because Lithuania did not control them, but the declared intent to include them demonstrated that Lithuania did not yet consider its borders to be final.

The first meeting of the Constituent Assembly was opened by President Antanas Smetona and chaired, at his suggestion, by the oldest deputy, who was the writer and journalist Miss Gabrielė Petkevičaitė (pen name *Bitė*; 1861–1943). The leader of the Lithuanian Farmer's Union, the agronomist Aleksandras Stulginskis (president of Lithuania in 1922–1926) was elected chairman. Justifying the voters' trust, the assembly unanimously passed a resolution proclaiming Lithuanian independence, reiterating the principles of the Act of February 16 that had been proclaimed in 1918. On 19 June, a coalition Christian Democratic-Populist Government led by the Peasant Populist leader Dr. Kazys Grinius was formed. Solidarity with Lithuania Minor was expressed by unanimous passage on 11 November 1921 of a resolution demanding that the Klaipėda region be joined to Lithuania.

On 1 August 1922, the Constituent Assembly passed the Lithuanian State Constitution, which was modelled on the democratic principles exemplified by France's Third Republic. The Lithuanian state was declared an independent democratic republic, with sovereignty belonging to the people. For the first time, Lithuanian became the official national language. Regardless of gender, origin, religion or ethnicity, all citizens of Lithuania were guaranteed equality under the law and other democratic rights. The tricolour national flag (yellow, green and red) marked a change from the flag of the rulers of the GDL, but the official coat of arms, the Vytis – a white figure of a mounted knight on a red background – was retained. The capital of the country was not named. The constitution gave great powers to the Seimas (parliament), which was made up of the elected representatives of the people. The Seimas and the President of the Republic, who was elected by the Seimas, were elected for three-year terms. The constitution gave broad autonomy to ethnic minorities living in Lithuania, and made elementary education compulsory.

The Vilnius problem and strained relations with Poland were partly responsible for the restrictions on the practice of democracy in Lithuania. The country was in a state of war. That was ostensibly the reason for censorship of the press, limitations on freedom of assembly, and attempts to

Session of the Lithuanian Constituent Assembly. Kaunas, 1920. Photograph courtesy of The Wroblewksi Library of the Lithuanian Academy of Sciences.

silence vocal opponents of the regime. The harshest critics of the government, such as National Union members Voldemaras and Smetona, spent time in jail.

With hopes of restoring a large historical Lithuania dashed, it was necessary to create a reliable economic base for a national state. In this agrarian country, the most important issue became ownership of the country's main resource, the land. Compared to Latvia and Estonia, estate owners in Lithuania owned about half as much land, and the estates themselves were about 5–6 times smaller. The average peasant's plot in Lithuania was 15.2 ha, compared to 21.0 ha in Latvia and 29.4 ha in Estonia. Landless peasants (21% of those employed in agriculture) desperately wanted land, as did the small landowners (about 25% of agricultural workers). They blamed their impoverished lives on the existence of the large estates and on the inequalities of land distribution. The social inequality was intensified by ethnic overtones: more than half of the large landowners were Warsaw-oriented, Polish-speaking "Old Lithuanians", who owned 26% of the country's land. Since half of the arable land belonged to large estates, only by redistributing these estate lands could the government hope to gain the support of the majority of the peasantry.

After many heated debates, the Constituent Assembly passed the basic Land Reform Law on 15 February 1922. State land and estates acquired by privilege from the tsarist government, all the land owned by the Bermondtians and those who fought in the Polish army against Lithuania's independence, as well as any land in excess of 80 ha owned by individuals, churches, monasteries and convents as well as other church institutions, was put into

a state land fund. The 80 ha limit was not chosen arbitrarily. It was the dividing line between the size of the farms of the Polish "Old Lithuanian" estate owners and the large farms acquired at the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century by hard-working newly rich Lithuanian peasants or, more rarely, by Lithuanian professionals, industrialists and merchants. (Even more radical action was taken in Estonia and Latvia, where land was seized from the German barons and only estates smaller than 50 ha were spared.) The first to be allotted land in Lithuania were the former volunteer soldiers, the landless peasants and small landholders (owning less than 10 ha), village craftsmen, and some state and social institutions.

As a result of the reforms, old villages were abandoned, people established farms around single homesteads, agricultural modernization began and the three-field crop rotation system disappeared. The state offered farmers a better selection of cereal seeds and breeding stock at subsidized rates and helped train agricultural specialists. Farmers began to use improved fertilizers, and their cereal output improved from 9 centners per hectare before WWI to 12 centners per hectare in the 1930s. Farmers increasingly formed cooperatives. Milk processing plants with modern equipment and refrigeration facilities were built, which increased the export of milk and meat products.

The German *Ostmark* was still in circulation in the country. The currency was known as *auksinai* in Lithuania. The decline in its value in the post-war slump had a negative effect on the Lithuanian economy. The catastrophic effects of inflation forced the Lithuanian government to seek a solution. On 9 August 1922, the Constituent Assembly passed the Currency Unit Law, which made the gold-backed litas, consisting of 100 cents, the currency of Lithuania. The litas was introduced on 1 October 1922. It had a value of 0.150462 grams of pure gold; the litas to US dollar ratio was 10:1. The litas held its value throughout the twenty-two years of independence. Because the currency was backed by gold, it was held in high esteem in other countries.

The standard of education rose now that Lithuania was independent. New schools were established. In 1919, there were already 1,036 schools in Lithuania, with 45,540 students. Higher education courses in Kaunas were officially given university status on 16 February 1922. During nearly two decades the university produced 3,700 specialists, scholars and educators. The Lithuanian language gained official status not only in government

institutions, but also in the military (the newly established Kaunas Military Academy) and in scientific and scholarly discourse. New traditions were born. The first national song festival took place in Kaunas in 1924.

These reforms were taking place in a small country in which ethnic Lithuanians dominated. According to data from the first Lithuanian census of 17 September 1923, the population of Lithuania (without the Vilnius and Klaipėda regions) was 2,028,971. The inhabitants were 82% Lithuanian, 7% Jewish, 4% German, 3% Polish, and 2.3% Russian. Lithuania was an agrarian country with 84% of the population living in rural areas; in rural areas, Lithuanians made up 91% of the population. Although an agricultural nation, 50% of the urban population was Lithuanian, with Jews comprising 33% (and only 0.5% of the rural population). The majority of professionals in the country were Lithuanian, but Jews dominated in the import/export business and business in general. 83% of business owners were Jewish, while Lithuanians comprised only 13%.

About 350,000 people of Lithuanian descent (180,000 of whom had been born in Lithuania) lived in the United States, about 100,000 Lithuanians lived in Vilnius and the surrounding region, and about 6,000 in England. During the first years of independence, thousands of emigrants returned to Lithuania, bought land, began businesses, established industrial firms and banks. Others became well known community activists, diplomats, and servicemen. Substantial sums of money were sent by Lithuanians in the United States to Lithuania to support its development. Émigré political movements financed Lithuanian political parties and raised money for nation-building work in Lithuania.

BECOMING A NATION

Lithuania Gets a Seaport – Annexation of Klaipėda

The priority of the new nation state was the Lithuanian nation. Considerable attention was therefore paid to East Prussia, a place where many of the local inhabitants spoke Lithuanian, where Lithuanian newspapers were published, and a vibrant Lithuanian culture existed. Having lost Vilnius, Lithuania turned its attention to Lithuania Minor. The British first floated the idea of granting Klaipėda to Lithu-

Prime Minister Ernestas Galvanauskas reviews the Lithuanian parade in Klaipėda in 1923.

ania as compensation for losing Vilnius, but later supported free-city status for Klaipėda. The idea of a swap did not suit the Lithuanians, because Vilnius was the historic capital, but Lithuania very much needed a port and did not think much of the free-city status option. Under the terms of the Treaty of Versailles, Klaipėda was under French administration, supported by a battalion of French infantry. The French were willing to cede Klaipėda to Lithuania only if Lithuania united with Poland, because Poland also sought to establish itself in Klaipėda. Prime Minister Ernestas Galvanauskas became convinced that Lithuania would never get Klaipėda through the League of Nations or the Conference of Ambassadors, so he decided that the solution was to take the region by force, following Piłsudski's example of presenting a *fait accompli* and then negotiating. As Antanas Smetona put it, without factual control there would be no juridical control. At the beginning of 1922, Lithuania's representative in Klaipėda, Jonas Žilius, confirmed to the Lithuanian government that the only way to get control of Klaipėda was by military force. Army officers believed that the operation could be accomplished within 24 hours.

Only a few people in the government knew about Galvanauskas's plan to prepare political cover for the Klaipėda action and a diplomatic defence of it. Seeking the support of the local residents and the creation of pro-Lithuanian sentiment in Klaipėda, Lithuania gave cash support to pro-

Lithuanian organizations, commissioned favourable articles in the press, and bought newspapers and property. Lithuanian-Americans also made sizeable financial contributions. Lithuanian leaders worked through diplomatic channels to ensure that Germany would not oppose a Lithuanian takeover, although it could not say so openly. The German government did not want Klaipėda to be given to Poland, perhaps because they saw France and Poland as more formidable potential future adversaries, and thus did not object to Lithuania's ousting the French from Klaipėda as long as Lithuania guaranteed the economic and cultural rights of the local Germans. Moscow tried to hinder Poland in any way that it could, so the Soviets too did not protest Lithuania's actions and even assured Lithuania that Russia would not remain passive if Poland tried to intervene.

The majority of Lithuanians in Klaipėda, having long been influenced by German culture and being Lutherans rather than Catholics, were mostly loyal to Germany and would not have initiated an uprising. But the nationally conscious activists of Lithuania Minor were in favour of union with Lithuania for the sake of preserving national culture and the language. Their interests coincided with the national and economic interests of Lithuania. On 16 November 1918, in Tilžė (Ger. *Tilsit*, Rus. *Sovetsk*), they founded the National Council of Lithuania Minor, whose goal was to seek the unification of Lithuania Minor and Major. In 1920, the council moved from Tilžė to Klaipėda and issued a resolution (signed by 24 persons) declaring that: "We Lithuanians who live in Prussian Lithuania ... demand ... the incorporation of Lithuania Minor into Lithuania Major". Only a minority of local Lithuanians actively supported plans for a revolt, and obviously, the national council did not have the resources to organize an armed uprising on their own, nor the means to communicate with the governments of Germany and Russia. It was left up to Lithuania to plan the implementation of the uprising. The psychological gap between Lithuania Minor and Major was evident. Galvanauskas and the leader of the planned insurrection, intelligence officer Jonas Budrys (Polovinskas), were surprised that Lithuanian army officers who had fought against the Poles, the Bermondtians and the Bolsheviks signed up reluctantly for the Klaipėda mission because they did not see it as a fight for their homeland.

On 7 January 1923, the Supreme Committee for the Salvation of Lithuania Minor (SCSLM), formed the previous December and chaired by Martynas Jankus, published a proclamation, *Broliai Šauliai!* (*Brother Ri-*

flemen!), which was an impassioned plea to the Lithuanian Riflemen's Union, requesting its help in freeing the Lithuanians of Lithuania Minor from what they described as unbearable living conditions and discrimination. This appeal, obviously coordinated in advance with the planners in Kaunas, became the official pretext for Lithuanian forces to enter the region, but every effort was made to make it appear a local uprising. On the night of 9–10 January, well over a thousand volunteers, dressed in civilian clothes, and carrying no Lithuanian documents, matches or cigarettes, or anything else that would identify them as nationals of Lithuania Major, crossed the border into the territory of Klaipėda. Among them were: 40 army officers and 584 soldiers, 455 riflemen (many of them students), 3 clerks, 2 doctors and 6 orderlies. They were met by about 300 local residents, including several Germans, lending weight to the argument made to the Allies that this was a local uprising. The rebellion participants were warned, in the event of a clash, to try and keep the number of French fatalities to a minimum. The action took place at a good time. In the West, there were heated debates in progress about unpaid German reparations and the entrance of French Army units into the Ruhr area. The march on Klaipėda went off smoothly. Kaunas portrayed it as a local rebellion, particularly since the local Germans did not oppose it. The Lithuanians later explained to the French that the revolt was against the German local government, not against the administration of Gabriel Jean Petisné.

In the course of the revolt, 16 Lithuanians and two Frenchmen were killed. In its wake, everyone registered protests – the French most vociferously, the Germans formally and even the British. The Poles took it quietly, trying not to provoke any military action by Germany. Piłsudski declared that his policies were essentially peaceful and that he would not attack Lithuania, his native land.

This was a triumph for Kaunas. Euphoria engulfed the whole country. The success of the "rebels" seemed like moral satisfaction for the loss of Vilnius. On 17 January 1923, the SCSLM announced its decision to join the Klaipėda region to Lithuania as an autonomous region, and requested military and financial support from the government of Lithuania. The Seimas was well disposed and approved the request on 24 January. On 17 February, the Conference of Ambassadors transferred sovereignty over Klaipėda to Lithuania. The Lithuanians considered this to be a huge diplomatic and military victory, which indeed it was.

On 8 May 1924, in Paris, Lithuania and the countries of the Conference of Ambassadors (United Kingdom, Italy, France and Japan) signed the Klaipėda Convention, an international agreement by which the Klaipėda Region became an autonomous region over which Lithuania had unconditional sovereignty. The 1925 Klaipėda Region census showed that there were 141,000 residents in the region: 64,000 identified themselves as Germans, 37,000 identified themselves as Lithuanians, and 34,000 identified themselves as *klaipėdiečiai* (Klaipėda locals who spoke Lithuanian at home). Since Lithuania had no qualms about considering these *klaipėdiečiai* Lithuanians, the population of the Klaipėda region was declared to be 50.8% Lithuanian. Lithuania acquired an ice-free port.

Having put in order its relations with the allies, and trying to avoid doubts about the territory's new status, Lithuania signed a series of agreements with Germany, including an important trade and shipping agreement, and on 29 January 1928, after long and difficult negotiations, Lithuania and Germany signed a border agreement in Berlin. The negotiated border left the Klaipėda territory on the Lithuanian side. After that, Lithuania believed that the Klaipėda question was just an internal issue. The Germans, however, did not think that technical treaties meant that they had renounced Klaipėda for all time.

Democracy of the Left and the Coup of December 1926

In spite of their geographical proximity and shared historic fate, plus, in the case of the Lithuanians and Latvians, their linguistic affinity, relations with Latvia and Estonia did not really develop. Although there had been some cooperation and some appeals to create an alliance during the wars of independence, the three countries travelled their separate paths. Latvia and Estonia avoided getting involved in the Polish-Lithuanian conflict over Vilnius. Both, in fact, gravitated towards Warsaw. Lithuania, because of the Vilnius problem, was left out of the schemes for forming a regional bloc led by Poland. Moscow used the Polish-Lithuanian conflict to its own advantage, which was detrimental to the interests of both Poland and the Baltic countries. It is true, though, that on 16 February 1921, Latvia recognized Lithuania *de jure*, which was much-needed support during Lithuania's time of international isolation. In March of that year, with the

help of international arbitration, the border between the two states was determined.

Many beautiful Baltoscandian ideas and plans were fostered, but collaboration with the Scandinavian countries did not develop either. Effectively isolated, on 28 September 1926, Lithuania signed a non-aggression and neutrality pact with the USSR in Moscow. In the text of this pact, the USSR reaffirmed that all of the provisions of the 1920 Peace Treaty were still in force. Georgy Chicherin, the People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs, appended a note confirming Lithuania's interests in Vilnius. The Soviets assured the Lithuanians that the *de facto* breaches of Lithuania's borders did not change Moscow's position on Lithuania's territorial integrity. So in spite of Polish displeasure, Moscow recognized Lithuania's sovereignty over Vilnius.

Lithuania's politics were affected by events in Europe. There were parliamentary crises and coups, and dictatorships were established – the Bolshevik dictatorship in the USSR and Benito Mussolini's in Italy. Authoritarian governments came to power in coups in Bulgaria and Portugal, and, closer to home, the May 1926 coup in Poland brought Piłsudski back to power. All this encouraged those in Lithuania who were not happy with rule by the Seimas ("Seimocracy") to take action. After three years of heavy-handed rule by the Christian Democratic bloc, the elections of 8–9 May 1926 for the 85-seat third Seimas had a sensational outcome: the Christian Democratic bloc lost. In June, a new ruling coalition was formed for the first time by the left. It included the Peasant Populist Union (the Populists), the Social Democrats, and seven representatives of ethnic minorities. Kazys Grinius, leader of the Peasant Populists, was elected president. The Social Democrats supported him only on the condition that he would coordinate all action with them. The government was dominated by the Peasant Populists and led by Prime Minister Mykolas Sleževičius.

The new ruling majority of the third Seimas immediately sought to broaden democratic rights in Lithuania and make it a fully functioning democracy. On 17 June, martial law was ended and political prisoners were amnestied, among them many secret Lithuanian Communist Party members. All restrictions on the press were lifted and for the first time in the country's history, freedom of assembly was allowed. In an effort to reduce the budget, the new government reduced wages, planned to introduce a civil registry of vital records (births, deaths and marriages), a move which

would have dealt a financial blow to the Catholic priests, especially since the government also planned to stop paying wages to the clergy in 1927. It also planned to reduce the number of officers in the military. Irate military officers bluntly expressed their dissatisfaction to one member of Seimas: "Gentlemen, it's not you who will reduce the army, but the army that will reduce you."

The government's sudden reforms and its lofty aims backfired. From the autumn of 1926 onward, the opposition began to speak more frequently in the Seimas and in their press about the threat communism posed to Lithuania's independence. They blamed the government for not controlling the communists because the number of security police and intelligence personnel had been reduced and there was no one to control anti-government demonstrations. Hooligans wandered the streets after communist meetings waving red flags and harassing uniformed soldiers. The opposition Christian Democratic bloc shuddered in fear of "Bolshevization", as did the nationalists, army officers and those who supported them. In November mounted police brutally dispersed a patriotic student demonstration. Accusations of "Bolshevization" were supplemented by accusations of Polonization, because in fulfilling their election promises the government permitted the Poles to establish numerous new Polish schools in Lithuania. Given the fact that the Poles were closing Lithuanian schools in the Vilnius region at the time, and the tense relationship between the two countries, this was interpreted as a dangerous threat to the nation.

Antanas Smetona compared democracy in Lithuania to children's shoes that were too big, bought so the children could eventually grow into them. In barely six years, in his view, the parliamentary tradition in Lithuania had not matured. It was particularly difficult to form coalitions. The Seimas appeared to be incompetent and pettily interfered in the executive government's affairs. To the conservatives, the democratic state model did not seem to serve the national interests. It failed to promote Lithuanian identity and enabled Bolshevism to thrive. At that moment the army stepped into the political arena. The soldiers had defended Lithuania's freedom and been instrumental in annexing Klaipėda. The military officers felt more powerful than the politicians. They took good care of their soldiers and the soldiers were loyal to them. In the army, the soldiers were given educational opportunities and opportunities to develop physically through sports and other activities. During the very early morning hours (around 2:00

Rebellion of 17 December 1926 – armoured units in front of the Army Headquarters.

am) of 17 December 1926, a group of army officers who were alarmed at the country's turn to the left and had been planning a coup, led their troops into the city and posted guards at key government buildings. At 03:43 a.m. armed officers broke into the assembly hall of the Seimas and disrupted an all-night session on the next year's budget. They dismissed the Seimas, arrested the president, all of the ministers and several members of the Seimas. Having encountered no resistance, Colonel Povilas Plechavičius declared himself the supreme leader of the coup and temporary dictator. Later in the day, however, he asked Antanas Smetona, the first president of the republic and leader of the National Unionists, to be the new president and to normalize the situation. Smetona agreed, since the military coup leaders had fulfilled his condition that the coup would take place without a single shot being fired.

Under pressure from the rebels, President Kazys Grinius, with the permission of the leadership of the Peasant Populist Union, dismissed the government of Prime Minister Sleževičius and instructed the National Unionist Augustinas Voldemaras to form a new government. Fearing the possibility of civil war, which might have been exploited by the Poles, President Grinius agreed to step down, believing that a new government would yet abide by the constitution. The National Unionists, having reached an agreement with the Christian Democratic bloc and wanting to avoid

Antanas Smetona: President of Lithuania 1919–1920 and 1926–1940.

the problem of international recognition of the new government, convened an extraordinary session of the third Seimas on 19 December 1926. In this session, with the help of Christian Democratic bloc votes, the National Union leader Smetona was elected the new president of the country. He swore to uphold the country's constitution. Seimas leadership positions went to Christian Democratic bloc members as well; Aleksandras Stulginskis was elected chairman.

Trying to justify the events of December 1926, the National Unionists and the Christian Democrats proclaimed that they had saved Lithuania from a communist takeover. The communist putsch in Estonia on 1 December 1924 lent some credibility to this claim, though the opposition parties saw no serious threat of a communist takeover in Lithuania. Nonetheless, four Lithuanian Communist Party leaders were arrested, sentenced to death and shot within ten days of the coup. This was meant to demonstrate that there had been a viable threat and that the guilty had been punished.

Smetona and Voldemaras openly stressed the need for a strong presidency. They had no use for political parties, claiming that they represented the will of only part of the nation, not all of it. They had no intention of returning to "the Seimas era", which they described as being times of disorder and anarchy. They said that the work begun by the third Seimas was unrealizable and that it was "contrary to the fundamental principles of the national psyche". When the left-wing opposition recovered from its shock, some of its members conspired to restore the Seimas. But when Juozas Pajaujis, a member of the Seimas who belonged to the Peasant Populist Union, was arrested in the spring of 1927, the insurrection planned by a group of his followers came to naught. The opposition protested the arrest of Pajaujis and rejected the government's declaration, giving the president an excuse to dissolve the third Seimas as of 12 April 1927, with no subsequent election date set, on the grounds that there would be a plebiscite. Thus President Smetona removed the strongest political force in the land, the Christian Democrats, as a governing force in one fell swoop.

Visitors to the 7th Lithuanian Agriculture and Industry Exposition, Kaunas, 1928.

On 8–9 September 1927, armed groups of Social Democrats organized putsches in several districts of Lithuania. They were successful in wresting control of the local government only in Tauragė, but their success was short-lived. The rebellion was quickly crushed, and most of those who took part were arrested and sentenced. Some of the rebels, including their leader Jeronimas Plečkaitis, went abroad. For a while they operated out of Riga, then Poland, organizing acts of terrorism in Lithuania. Assisted by authoritarian Poland, they harboured plans to overthrow the undemocratic government of Smetona. This discredited the Social Democrats in the eyes of the public in Lithuania.

President Smetona, accompanied by military officers, ministers, journalists and camera crews recording the events, spent the whole summer and autumn of 1927 travelling from town to town, where he was met by the local Lithuanian communities at ceremonial gates beautifully decorated with flowers and garlands by Lithuanian organizations and students, and then met at similarly decorated gates by the local Jewish communities. The president visited Catholic churches, Jewish synagogues and Russian Orthodox churches. He reassured the people by explaining the new leadership's plans to restore order in the country, to curb irresponsible populist politicians from making empty promises, to show more concern for or-

dinary people, to put an end to corruption in public institutions, and to make life better and more peaceful. President Smetona said that this unprecedented tour enabled the people to learn about the future plans of the new government first-hand and built public confidence in the government. Thus the sons of conservative, religious Catholic peasants, army lieutenants and riflemen, temporarily sacrificed democracy for a dictatorship and supported the authoritarian regime of President Smetona.

President Antanas Smetona and Prime Minister Augustinas Voldemaras

For a time, the best-known public figure at home and in the West was the flamboyant Voldemaras, a renowned orator. He was not just prime minister but also foreign minister. Although as foreign minister, he did not seem to have any new ideas for foreign policy. President Smetona tried to stick to a political "middle path" (his term) not associated with any specific country (such as Germany or Russia) or political group supporting that country. Voldemaras, on the other hand, believed in the saying, "The enemy of my enemy is my friend." He therefore held the position that a solution to the Vilnius question was to be found via Moscow and Berlin, and pragmatically sought the support of the USSR in the struggle against Poland.

Once Germany became a member of the League of Nations, it could no longer support Lithuania's ambitions regarding Vilnius, but it was precisely with Germany that eight agreements were signed in 1928 and the most was achieved on the diplomatic front. Voldemaras pushed foreign policy in a more radical direction, stressing that Lithuania's attitude to Poland had not changed, and that without Vilnius, Lithuania was not whole. Voldemaras miscalculated, however, when he agreed to negotiations with Poland in April 1927, hoping to demonstrate that the Vilnius question was not finally settled. But the Poles refused to talk about Vilnius at the negotiations. On his return from a meeting in Paris with the Polish foreign minister August Zaleski on 22 June 1927, Voldemaras's train was met at the Kaunas railway station by a group of military officers who told him that any more negotiations with the Poles under such conditions would meet with strong opposition. Smetona and Voldemaras heeded the warning and became more careful: negotiations with Poland ceased, and in 1928 Lithuania's constitution was amended to designate Vilnius as Lithuania's capital.

Lithuanian delegation at the League of Nations in Geneva in 1926. From the left: Dovas Zaunius, Prime Minister Augustinas Voldemaras and Ambassador Petras Klimas. Photograph by H. Roger-Viollet.

Poland understood the game the Lithuanians were playing and, in an effort to make them more acquiescent, it instituted economic and cultural sanctions against Lithuanian organizations in the Vilnius region. For this, Lithuania denounced Poland to the League of Nations on 15 October 1927, and the situation became particularly tense, since Lithuania had never called off its state of war against Poland. There was a direct confrontation between the two countries in the League of Nations in Geneva on 10 December when Piłsudski asked Voldemaras: "Is it war or peace?" Voldemaras, caught off guard, answered that there was no state of war between Lithuania and Poland.

The League of Nations was pleased about this and a resolution was passed in which the line between the two countries was no longer called a "demarcation line" but an "administration line". In deference to the Lithuanian position, it was not called a "border". Both countries considered the results in Geneva to be a victory, and on his return to Kaunas, Voldemaras announced on radio and in a speech at the Officers' Club that "[…] we have come out onto the world political stage". But in reality, Vilnius had slipped further away from Lithuania's grasp.

President Antanas Smetona inspects the cavalry in 1938.

The Vilnius problem was further complicated by relations with the Vatican. Questions arose regarding the formation of an ecclesiastical province for Lithuania and establishing diplomatic relations. In the course of the government's negotiations with the Vatican, the opposition accused the Christian Democrats of abandoning the dioceses of Sejny (Seinai) and Vilnius. But Voldemaras managed to sort the matter out on 27 September 1927 during a visit to Rome, when he signed a concordat with the Vatican that defined the position of the Catholic Church in Lithuania. However, relations between the Church leadership, which backed the Christian Democratic bloc, and the country's leadership remained complicated.

Relations with the British and the French deteriorated during the visit of Voldemaras to London in May 1928. This was just after Lithuania had proclaimed its new constitution, which declared Vilnius to be the capital of Lithuania. The visit, in effect, involved London in the dispute over Vilnius. Whitehall was furious over this unexpected and unacceptable move by its guest and Lithuania's international isolation continued.

On 15 May 1928, "with the unanimous support of all cabinet ministers", Smetona announced the new constitution. It strengthened the powers of the president and ensured his dominance over the Seimas. Smetona could now dissolve the Seimas at will and decide when to hold elections. When the Seimas was not in session, the State Council was empowered to draft

and debate legislation, but only the president had the power to enact laws. The president was to be elected for seven years by a select group of national representatives, and he was to oversee personally all appointments and dismissals. In effect, the constitution formalized the existing situation, legalizing the authoritarian regime of Smetona.

As the European tendency to preserve the inviolability of borders grew, Voldemaras could not change anything. As both prime minister and foreign affairs minister, he was scarcely able to keep up with all his duties. He conflicted with several of his ministers and began to aspire to be the solitary ruler in the country. Following an assassination attempt on Voldemaras by Socialist Revolutionary students in May 1929, dissatisfaction grew. In September 1929, all the cabinet ministers stood down in a body, and thus Voldemaras also had to stand down. On 23 September, President Smetona appointed economist Juozas Tūbelis prime minister. Voldemaras was left with nothing after imprudently declining an offer to become the minister of foreign affairs. Smetona, the quiet master of manipulation, wielded his scalpel again and lanced a few more boils: he distanced himself from the clique of rebellious military officers and later closed down the quasi-secret, armed radical nationalist organization Iron Wolf, which considered Voldemaras to be its leader. The Iron Wolf, the so-called Voldemarists, split from the National Union and formed the Nationalist Party. The Voldemarists would continue to operate underground and make more than one unsuccessful attempt to return their patron to power.

Smetona sought to identify himself with an historical hero, to seek an historical justification for authoritarian rule. Heroic role models were available: the grand dukes of the past provided an inspirational link to modern 20th-century Lithuania, which originated in the historical state. The traditions of the GDL and the names of such famous Lithuanian grand dukes as Gediminas, Kęstutis and Vytautas the Great inspired Lithuanians and strengthened their national consciousness. The 500th anniversary of the death of Lithuanian grand duke Vytautas was ceremoniously commemorated in 1930. Vytautas was the perfect hero for the times – a great leader in war, the nation's master strategist. It suited everyone to honour and glorify Vytautas and it was easy to find modern relevance in his historic role. He was a military leader who won the Battle of Grünwald (*Žalgiris*), expanded the territory of Lithuania from the Baltic to the Black Sea, sought to become King of Lithuania but had his crown "stolen" by "treacherous"

Promoting the cult of Vytautas the Great: a special ceremony in Pasvalys in 1930 to honour a painting of the Grand Duke as it tours Lithuania.

The Vytautas the Great War Museum opened in 1935. Architect Vladimiras Dubeneckis. Photograph by Vytautas Augustinas.

Poles. The Catholic Church also approved of Vytautas because he was instrumental in the Christianization of Lithuania, and he built 33 churches. His model of firm rule appealed to the nationalists. Sportsmen praised Vytautas's physical fitness and the temperance movement even claimed that Vytautas never drank wine or beer.

Vytautas's tolerance appealed to the ethnic minorities. He was the one who brought Tartars to Lithuania and he granted privileges to the Jews that they would only get much later in the rest of Europe. Vytautas embodied a national and political ideal that was acceptable to virtually every Lithuanian: he saved Lithuania from being absorbed by Poland and he was laid to rest in Vilnius. The Committee for the Commemoration of the 500th Anniversary of the Death of Vytautas the Great decided to build a Vytautas the Great War Museum in Kaunas as a commemorative pantheon. A painting of Vytautas the Great toured Lithuania, with formal receptions arranged in all the cities and towns of Lithuania, and many monuments to him were built.

Thus the cult of Vytautas the Great was encouraged to remind Lithuanians of the glorious life of this hero of ancient times and to draw a parallel with the contemporary strong leader of the nation, Antanas Smetona – a second Vytautas, as it were – and the way he ruled Lithuania. The most important message of the Vytautas jubilee commemorations was national unity through greater patriotism, based on finding strength in the glorious pagan past of the GDL. The commemorations also sent the message that Lithuania was an old historic state.

The Antanas Smetona and Juozas Tūbelis Tandem

Juozas Tūbelis, a founder and director of various Lithuanian agricultural and economic institutions, served in various government capacities during the first years of independence. As prime minister, he turned out to be the diametrical opposite of the eccentric Voldemaras. He calmly led the government from 1929 to 1938, the longest-serving prime minister of the interwar period, and headed the Nationalist Union from 1931 to 1938. Tūbelis fully understood Lithuania's economics and finances and he was resolutely opposed to the devaluation of the litas. His prudent economic policies enabled Lithuania to survive the Great Depression with the coun-

Juozas Tūbelis – Prime Minister from September 1929 to March 1938.

try's finances intact. Lithuania did not take on more debt than it could bear. He was an economic conservative: avoid spending more than you earn, improve the financial situation by expanding production. He did not borrow abroad and he weighed his decisions carefully, believing in the value of autarky – getting by with as few imports as possible.

Lithuania's 160,000 new farmers undertook land reclamation projects, making arable land out of thousands of hectares of grazing meadows, scrub and forest. The amount of land under cultivation increased by a third and Lithuania became self-sufficient in grains for both stock feed and human consumption, exporting the surplus (132,000 tonnes in 1938). Independent farmers and agricultural cooperatives imported thousands of Holstein cattle from Denmark, Sweden and Germany, and otherwise improved their stock. As a result, milk yield per cow increased from 700 litres to 2,000 litres, surpassing many other countries. When private economic initiatives were insufficient to reach the desired impact on the national economy, Tūbelis created cooperatives or broad-based shareholder companies and promoted their growth. He believed in moderate state regulation of labour, education and culture, believing regulation to be both useful and necessary. Accordingly, his policies have sometimes been described as a variety of moderate state socialism. Tūbelis's activities strengthened capitalism in Lithuania, and his support of cooperatives and other associations enabled the formation of large amalgamated organizations like *Lietūkis* (Lithagro), *Pienocentras* (Milk Centre) and *Maistas* (Food).

The export of grains decreased, but other agricultural products (pork, butter, cheese, meat products) made up for the decrease, and total agricultural production accounted for 65% of exports in 1935 and 78% by 1939. In 1924, Lithuania exported only 542 tonnes of butter, but by 1939 the figure was 17,413 tonnes, while exports of pork had increased to 41,000 tonnes. The sugar and preserves industries grew, as did the textile indus-

try. In 1939, there were 80 firms producing linen, wool, cotton and silk textiles and knitwear. The footwear, paper and glass industries expanded. In short, industries producing manufactured goods from primarily local raw materials grew fourfold. The cities grew and modernized. In 1939, Kaunas had 154,000 inhabitants, 60% of whom were Lithuanian, and it was a modern orderly city. Schools, libraries, new museums and university faculty buildings were built. There were improvements in health care, new hospitals were built, 1,500 doctors were trained and mortality began to decline, getting close to the rate for developed European countries (13 people per 1,000). In the number of births, Lithuania left Latvia and Estonia far behind. There were plans to begin industrializing Lithuania around 1941–1942.

The authoritarian regime of the mild-mannered publicist and public speaker Smetona did not satisfy the right-wing National Unionists, who were impressed by Italy's Fascism and its energetic leader. In the army, influential Voldemarists kept trying to organize a putsch to bring their leader Voldemaras back to power. The most dangerous attempt occurred in 1934, when General Petras Kubiliūnas ordered army units stationed in the streets of Kaunas. The putsch attempts never threatened Smetona directly, however, and they were all stopped in time. After this last attempt, however, Voldemaras was imprisoned for four years, pardoned in 1938 and exiled abroad. To ensure the Army's future loyalty, a simple solution was found: the 1,750 officers in an army of 25,000 soldiers were paid generous salaries, received free health care, accommodations and other benefits. The regime also had the support of the police and a smoothly operating department of state security.

As criticism mounted that the president was not subjecting himself to the test of elections, laws were adopted that at least created the appearance of elections. On 2 May 1931, the local government councils became units of the districts (*apskritys*). District chiefs chaired district councils, which selected "special representatives of the nation", who in turn elected the president. While the "special representatives" were being selected in this manner, it was nearly impossible to select anyone opposed to Smetona. In this way, Smetona set up a system that would keep re-electing him. The "special representatives of the nation" unanimously chose him as president of Lithuania on 11 December 1931, and again on 14 November 1938. After Adolf Hitler came to power in Germany in 1933, however, and au-

thoritarian regimes were established in Estonia and Latvia in 1934, Smetona's regime appeared by comparison to be quite liberal.

Military officers began to demand a greater share of the budget to modernize the armed forces. In 1935, the National Defence Council adopted an armed forces reorganization plan which meant that about 20% of the national budget would go to defence. Tūbelis, who was prime minister for 7.5 years, was a guarantor of stability in the government, which gave Lithuania a chance to develop in all spheres of life without any assistance from abroad. But Lithuania also suffered some of the consequences of the worldwide Great Depression. Growth in the agricultural and industrial sectors was insufficient to make up for the rapid rise in the cost of living. Many small farms went bankrupt and had to be sold at auction. In 1935, *Pieno Centras*, the agency that bought milk products from producers, reduced the price it paid thrice as a result of falling worldwide commodity prices. The farmers of Suvalkija, the southwestern part of Lithuania, announced a strike. They kept milk from being delivered to Kaunas and they established guard posts on the roads. When the police tried to dismantle them, riots broke out and the police in Veiveriai shot three farmers and arrested hundreds. In 1934–1935, when tension was high between Lithuania and Germany as a result of a trial of Nazis in Klaipėda, Germany closed its markets to Lithuanian agricultural products and blocked Lithuania's trade with other nations. The government subsidized farmers to compensate for the low prices for their agricultural products. Tūbelis managed to establish trade relations with Great Britain, which became Lithuania's major trading partner for both imports and exports.

The events in Suvalkija were a heavy blow for both Prime Minister Tūbelis and Smetona. Political parties, especially the Christian Democratic bloc, were vocal critics of the regime. At the beginning of 1936, when the Christian Democrats became particularly active, political parties were officially banned in Lithuania, except for the National Union, which was not officially considered a party, but ostensibly only an organization supporting the regime. At first it appeared that political parties no longer existed.

Nevertheless, as the opposition continued to demand the formation without delay of a government that had the support of the people and to restore the Seimas, the parties of the left clung to Populist Party member Sleževičius's slogan: "We will keep fighting until the Seimas is reconvened". People close to Smetona talked him into reconvening the Seimas as a

means of defusing popular discontent – as a political "vent". So the Seimas was revived as an institution. But candidates to the Seimas could only be nominated by the district councils and, in Kaunas, by the city council. The councils were, of course, controlled by the National Union. Community organizations or citizens' groups were not allowed to propose their own candidates. In this way, opposition candidates were not allowed to participate in the Seimas elections. Thus, the elections of the summer of 1936 were not democratic, and the fourth Seimas that was elected was dubbed the "Smetona Seimas". The majority of its 49 members were National Unionists or others loyal to the government.

On 12 May 1938, the authoritarian regime was further strengthened by the proclamation of a new constitution, signed by President Smetona and Prime Minister Mironas. It proclaimed that Lithuania was a republic, but the word "democratic" was omitted. Under the new constitution, sovereignty still belonged to the people and the government was headed by a president elected for seven years. Presidential decrees, however, now required the prime minister to be a co-signatory, as did decisions pertaining to national defence. The president still had the right to enact legislation, draw up and ratify treaties, appoint and dismiss senior officials, and, as supreme commander of the armed forces, appoint and dismiss the general of the Lithuanian army. Vilnius was again designated the capital of Lithuania. This constitution was an absolute guarantor of the authoritarian regime.

Smetona now felt he had little to fear from the activities of the weak left-wing parties. They published their newspapers, but were politically powerless. Even the underground communist party, which had about 1,200 members and received financing from Moscow, was not much of a threat. The Christian Democratic (CDPL) bloc and the Catholic Action Centre (CAC), however, demonstrated great organizational strength and kept breathing down the National Unionists' necks, not permitting them to monopolize the public ideological discourse. Catholics had bigger organizations and youth groups than the National Union and their press was more influential. Christian Democratic sympathizers openly aspired to take part in governing the country. They supported the General of the Lithuanian Army Stasys Raštikis, who was both politically ambitious and very popular with the public. Even though Raštikis was married to the president's niece (daughter of the president's brother), after a long contentious relationship, President Smetona dismissed him from his post in April 1940.

Jews and Poles in Interwar Lithuania

For centuries there had been no serious anti-Semitism in Lithuania because Lithuanian peasants were completely dependent on the predominantly Jewish merchants and wholesale buyers of their crops, and these Jews earned their livelihoods by dealing with the Lithuanian peasants. Jews were noted for their literacy and their love of books and in that sense they were a good example for the Lithuanian national movement, even though differences in religion, culture and language meant that the two communities had little in common and viewed each other with a measure of distrust. The Lithuanian peasants did not view trade as "real work", while the Jews viewed Lithuanian peasants as uneducated country people with whom they did business. In the nineteenth century, the emerging Lithuanian culture meant nothing to them, just as it meant nothing to the Poles. The Jews spoke Russian or Polish with the Lithuanians. In the 20th century the situation began to change. Lithuanians began cooperating with Jews in getting deputies elected to the Russian Duma to defeat Polish rivals. Both sides, however, saw this as a pragmatic and mutually beneficial move, but hardly a strategic partnership.

As World War I drew to a close, the leaders of the nascent Lithuanian state sought the support of Lithuania's Jews. The Lithuanian Jewish community on the whole supported the goal of an independent Lithuania, especially the Jews of Vilnius, who preferred Lithuanian to Russian or Polish control of the city. In November 1918, Jewish representatives were invited to join the Council of Lithuania, and the first, provisional Lithuanian government included Jakub Wygodzki as Minister for Jewish Affairs, Simon Rosenbaum as Deputy Foreign Minister, and Nahman Rachmilewitz as Deputy Commerce Minister. A few thousand Jews volunteered for the newly created Lithuanian army. Simon Rosenbaum went to the Paris Peace Conference as a member of the Lithuanian delegation to support the Lithuanian government's claim of Jewish support. In an agreement reached at the conference, the Lithuanian delegation agreed to perhaps the furthest-reaching provisions for Jewish autonomy in Eastern Europe.

The first Jewish National Council in Lithuania was elected in January 1920, with the right to levy taxes and regulate the Jewish community's cultural and religious life and social welfare, as well as register births, deaths and marriages. Lithuania's Jews also elected Jewish representatives to the

Sportsmen of the Jewish Hapoel Club march down one of the main streets of Kaunas in 1935. Archive of the Lithuanian Jewish Association in Israel.

Lithuanian parliament. Perhaps the most notable achievement of Lithuania's Jewish community was the establishment and development of an extensive network of Yiddish- and Hebrew-language schools, which by 1923 was educating ninety-three percent of Lithuanian Jewish children. Formal national autonomy, however, was short-lived. In 1924, the government closed the Ministry for Jewish Affairs and dissolved the Jewish National Council, considering them unnecessary, since the constitution guaranteed the rights of minorities. However, the Jewish community retained the freedom to run its educational, social and religious affairs, and the government continued to subsidize the Jewish religious community. The census of 1923 recorded 155,000 Jews (7.6% of Lithuania's population), making them Lithuania's largest ethnic minority.

Lithuanians conceived of their newly established state as a nation-state, to be dominated by ethnic Lithuanians. One of the purposes of the national movement had been to create an urban Lithuanian professional and business class. These sectors of the economy had traditionally been dominated by the Jews, thus competition based on ethnicity caused some friction between the communities. As Lithuanians flooded into cities and got jobs in industry and commerce, especially after the world economic crisis, competition and ill feelings increased. Many Jews were members of the liberal professions: 42% of Lithuania's doctors were Jewish, with somewhat

smaller percentages working in law, art and journalism. In the 1930s, Lithuanian businessmen began to attack Jewish merchants rather aggressively in the newspaper *Verslas* (Business), openly using the slogan "Lithuania for Lithuanians".

Language was an additional source of tension. Lithuanian was the official language of the country, and reticence to use the Lithuanian language in public was perceived by people as disloyalty to the Lithuanian state. Lithuania's Jews, however, were accustomed to speaking with their Lithuanian neighbors in Russian and Polish (and with each other in Russian, Polish or Yiddish), and many did not have a proper grasp of Lithuanian in the early years of independence, so they thought they were being treated unfairly. To its credit, in the mid-1930s the Smetona regime spoke out against increasing anti-Semitic rhetoric. The minister of national defence issued an order to district commandants to punish all persons fomenting anti-Jewish activity. Smetona criticized Nazi racist theories and maintained that in Lithuania there was "room for all", and stressed that Lithuania's ethnic minorities were not foreigners, but fellow citizens. As in much of Europe, incidents of anti-Semitism, sometimes violent, did occur and anti-Semitic propaganda increased, but it was not officially tolerated.

The Jews were a diverse society, with many parties and organizations. Many young Jews were increasingly secular, which the religious establishment viewed in a negative light. Major political parties included the Zionists (secular), Agudas Yisroel (religion-based), the Folkspartey (sought national-cultural autonomy) and others. The tiny underground communist party had only 514 Jewish members in 1933 but Jews made up the majority of the party, with ethnic Lithuanians making up a third.

The National Union appreciated Jewish assistance with the Klaipėda and Vilnius problems, but Jewish participation in local government elections was seen as an "unjustified" attempt by the Jews to increase their influence. Jews were also denied employment in the civil service, and the number of Jewish students at the university dropped significantly throughout the 1930s due to restrictive measures. As the cities became more Lithuanian, the activities of Lithuanians and their agricultural cooperatives inevitably weakened Jewish commercial positions. In 1934, for example, the share of Lithuanian capital in exports was 45% and by 1938 it was 70%. In some spheres the Jews clearly predominated: they exported more horses, pelts and skins and more forest products; and they also imported more. In gen-

eral, Jews lived a separate community life and were not well integrated into Lithuanian society.

The cultural life of the Polish community (who made up 3.2% of Lithuania's population) revolved around Polish schools. The situation of the Polish speakers was made difficult by Poland's discriminatory policies toward the Lithuanian minority in the Vilnius region, which prompted the Lithuanian government to retaliate with similar restrictions on Poles in Lithuania. The number of Polish children in elementary schools declined over time: in 1923 there were 2,852 pupils in 30 Polish-language schools while by 1932 the number of schools was only 15, with 603 pupils. Government policies were responsible for the decline. As of 1927, an administrative practice was introduced which required parents to indicate a pupil's ethnicity. A child could go to a Polish school only if both his parents were Poles; if one of them was Lithuanian, the child had to go to a Lithuanian school.

The influence of the Polish speakers to determine their own affairs was limited, because the government was trying to make them Lithuanian, considering them to be just Polonized Lithuanians anyway. President Smetona reasoned that since they had once become Poles, why could they not revert to being Lithuanians again? Since the Poles did not live concentrated in one area, they were unable to find Polish schools for their children to attend in all parts of Lithuania. Thus they sent their children to clandestine schools; there were, it is estimated, around 40 such schools in 1935. Polish education was supported by the Polish cultural organizations *Pochodnia* (Torch), *Oswiata* (Education) and *Jutrzenka* (Dawn), which all received funding from Poland. They, in turn, financed Polish elementary schools, and secondary schools in Kaunas, Panevėžys and Ukmergė, which also received funding from the Lithuanian government.

Since the Poles of Lithuania did not have much scope to manoeuvre politically due to the poor relations between Lithuania and Poland, they devoted most of their attention to cultural activities. In general, Lithuania's ethnic minorities, including Russians and Germans, despite having the freedom to cultivate their languages and cultures, felt they were second-class citizens, facing invisible barriers when they applied for public service jobs. Germans and Poles made some attempts to get cultural autonomy on the Jewish model, but the Russian minority did not.

By 1939 the effect of international events on both Lithuanians and ethnic minorities was evident. The presence of Red Army units polarized

For more than ten years, the border between Lithuania and Poland was closed. Relatives living on either side meet at the administration line. Photograph ca 1937.

the country: on the right, Lithuanian youth organizations became more radical and nationalistic, while on the left, Jewish youth and some Lithuanian young people were expressing their support for the USSR and Bolshevism. Neither side was satisfied by the authoritarian regime of Smetona, although for different reasons.

The Independence Generation

During its two decades of independence, Lithuania had become distinctively Lithuanian, shedding its superimposed Polish and Russian influences. Smetona had essentially succeeded in implementing his regime's priorities and his state model: creation of a national culture and a Lithuanian-speaking Lithuania. The national culture, unregulated and unfettered, blossomed. A new generation of educated, competent people had grown up who were open to the outside world and capable of applying what they learned to the Lithuanian context. Lithuanians valued books and the press ever since the time the tsar had imposed a ban on Lithuanian publications (1864–1904), and as a result, illiteracy was essentially eliminated. In 1937, there were 150 Lithuanian and Russian periodical publications with a combined circulation of 930,000. In 1938, there were 2,319 elementary schools in the country, with 5,110 teachers and 283,000 pupils.

The Lithuanian language became dominant in all spheres of the nation's life. Schools of higher education included the Vytautas Magnus University in Kaunas, the Academy of Agriculture in Dotnuva, and the Veterinary Academy in Kaunas, as well as the Pedagogical Institute, the School of Art and the Conservatoire. About 1,500 young Lithuanians received scholarships and completed studies in engineering, navigation, medicine, languages, history, and military studies abroad.

This era of independence saw the birth of Lithuanian art, architecture and a distinctive school of philosophy. Poetry and literature reached a high standard and writers experimented with formerly unheard of styles. Psychological and satirical novels appeared, as did historical and realist dramas. Professional journalists wrote commentaries on the competing ideas and priorities of the Catholics, the nationalists and the left in the context of European as well as Lithuanian developments. As Lithuanians retreated from Russian cultural influences and ignored the Poles, they were more open to German and French cultural influences, but remained equally wary of influences from all cultural giants.

The Smetona regime did not regulate the development of culture, its content or spirit, though there was much discussion about the creation of a Lithuanian national culture. State funds were used to create a professional opera, ballet and theatre and to help form a national cultural elite. On 1 November 1938, the Antanas Smetona Institute of Lithuanian Studies was founded. It was an academic institution for the study of the Lithuanian language, folklore and history, and was responsible for organizing material and sources in those fields, defining technical terms, and undertaking field work to record the rich heritage of Lithuanian folk songs, lore and customs. Its members represented the field of Lithuanian studies both at home and abroad. The institute continued compiling the *Dictionary of the Lithuanian Language* that was begun by Kazimieras Būga in 1902. The first volumes appeared while Lithuania was under German occupation, then more appeared during the Soviet occupation, although the work in the Soviet era was slowed down and hindered by political overseers. This unique lexicographical work was completed in 2001. The dictionary consists of 20 volumes, a total of 22,000 pages. It lists half a million Lithuanian words, giving examples of their use.

National and state traditions were being created, national monuments erected, respect for traditions encouraged. The nation had to have nation-

Chamber of Industry and Commerce, Kaunas.
Architect Vytautas Landsbergis-Žemkalnis, 1938.

al heroes and places to commemorate them. That was the idea in 1922 behind the construction of the Church of the Resurrection in Kaunas, a monumental and inspiring national shrine designed to reflect Lithuanian style and feature Lithuanian ornamentation. It was intended to be a symbol of national unity and gratitude for regained freedom, and to reflect the religious and national spirit of the Lithuanian nation. The church was Kaunas's tallest building. Designed by architect Kārlis Reisons, the building was constructed from reinforced concrete slabs in record time. The cornerstone for the church was laid in 1934, and by the spring of 1940 the major construction work was finished. During the Soviet occupation, it was converted into a radio factory, and was only restored as a shrine in the first years of the 21st century (the church was consecrated in 2004).

In the late 1920s, as the tenth anniversary of independence approached, crosses and patriotic monuments were built to commemorate the wars of independence, and the graves of Lithuanian soldiers were tended. On 23 November 1934, an unknown soldier was interred in the courtyard of the War Museum in Kaunas, next to a monument for those who perished fighting for Lithuania's freedom. Ceremonies to honour the war dead were devised, respect and gratitude for soldiers who gave their lives for Lithuania were cultivated. Lithuanian Army Day, commemorating the establishment of the army on 23 November, was ceremoniously celebrated every year.

Pienocentras (Milk Centre), Kaunas, ca 1938.
Architect Vytautas Landsbergis-Žemkalnis.

From 1930 on, the 8th day of September, the day the coronation of Vytautas was to occur, was celebrated as a national holiday. Government institutions were decorated with large portraits of Vytautas the Great and Smetona. There were military parades, processions through the streets of the cities, enactments of dramas, and banquets for foreign visitors. These celebrations emphasized the link between past and present and served an educational purpose. They were also intended to demonstrate unity between the army and the people.

In time, modern heroes of the young nation emerged. On 15–17 July 1933, two Lithuanian-Americans, Steponas Darius and Stasys Girėnas, flew the small single-engine airplane *Lituanica* on a non-stop flight from New York to Lithuania. After flying 6,411 km in 37 hours and 11 minutes without stopping to refuel (the second longest flight in the world then without refueling), the aviators suffered a disaster in bad weather over the territory near what was then Soldin, Germany (now Myślibórz, Poland), and crashed just 636 km short of their goal. Almost a hundred thousand people were waiting at the Kaunas airport to see the *Lituanica* appear in the western sky; when they heard the news, many wept. In a letter they wrote before setting off on their flight, the pilots urged Lithuanian youth to dedicate their lives to bringing honour to their homeland, and this exhortation inspired thousands of young men and women. A mausoleum was built for

these two heroes in Kaunas, but the Nazis partially destroyed it and the Soviets completed the demolition. On 21–22 May 1935, another Lithuanian-Americans, Feliksas Vaitkus, flying the *Lituanica II*, attempted to complete the feat that Darius and Girėnas had attempted. He did complete a solo transatlantic flight (only the sixth pilot at the time to have done so), but was forced to land in Ireland, thus not accomplishing his goal.

These events inspired young people's interest in aviation and in flying and gliding as sports. The talented aircraft designer and builder Colonel Antanas Gustaitis, who had begun designing airplanes in 1925 and was head of the Lithuanian air force from 1935, constructed a series of aircraft and called them ANBO (from the acronym made from the first letters of *Antanas nori būti ore* – Antanas wants to be in the air). The military aviation factory in Kaunas produced 66 such aircraft. A group of three ANBO IV aircraft commanded by Gustaitis flew 10,000 km in 1934, visiting virtually every European capital city. Creatively combining engines and fuselages imported from abroad, the Lithuanian military aviation factory in Kaunas designed and built their own aircraft for military and sporting purposes, including light bombers and gliders.

As Lithuania began to participate in international sport competitions, there were some victories. In 1937 in Riga, Lithuanians became European basketball champions with crucial help from some Lithuanian-American coaches and players. As the train carrying the players returned from Riga, it was met at every station along the way in Lithuania by cheering crowds with flowers. The following year, the women's basketball team won a silver medal at the championship in Rome. In 1939, the Lithuanians won the European championship a second time in Kaunas. Basketball became Lithuania's favourite sport for all time. The victories were seen as a symbol of national success and a triumph of physical and psychological training. Sport became an integral part of everyday life. Its popularity was demonstrated at the first Lithuanian Olympiad in Kaunas in 1938, in which Lithuanians from abroad participated in large numbers.

Lithuanian communities abroad were growing and becoming more far-flung geographically. Small farmers and others who could not make an adequate living, especially during the economic crisis, emigrated. Over 20 years, about 100,000 people left the country. About 30% of the emigrants were Jews headed for Palestine, the Republic of South Africa and the United States. Ethnic Lithuanians emigrated mostly to South American

Transatlantic pilots Steponas Darius and Stasys Girėnas.

ANBO VIII light bomber designed by General Antanas Gustaitis and built in Kaunas, 1939.

In the Kaunas Sports Arena in 1939, the Lithuanian men's basketball team became European champions for the second time.

countries (Argentina, Brazil, Venezuela and Uruguay), because the United States had introduced immigration quotas. The Society To Support Lithuanians Abroad (*Draugija užsienio lietuviams remti*) was created to assist them and help them maintain ties with the homeland.

The society provided Lithuanian communities abroad with Lithuanian periodicals, sent priests and teachers to serve them and established several elementary schools. As the emigrant groups in the United States were the strongest financially and organizationally, most of the society's assistance to them consisted of facilitating contacts with kindred organizations in Lithuania, or professional and other person-to-person contacts. At the World Lithuanian Congress in Kaunas in 1935, which was attended by 3,000 delegates and guests from 19 countries, it was evident that most Lithuanians abroad felt close to Lithuania and they cared about its future, although they did not support the political restrictions enacted by the authoritarian regime.

During the short years of independence, the country faced great international challenges and territorial disputes, as well as internal political challenges, but nonetheless grew into a successful state. The young generation of Lithuanians who were born and grew up in independent Lithuania

were patriotic, held the country's sovereignty to be a great achievement and valued the nation's historic heritage. The generation that won Lithuania's independence, the nation-builders, succeeded in achieving their goals.

THE ERA OF ULTIMATUMS

Lithuania and Poland: Relations without Relations

Lithuania's relations with neighbouring countries were problematic. Poland, the USSR and Germany all presented obstacles to developing closer ties with Latvia and Estonia. It was not until 12 September 1934 that the Baltic States signed a political and diplomatic agreement in Geneva. This was the Baltic Entente, or Baltic Covenant, which sought to strengthen economic, social, legal and administrative cooperation. It strengthened the countries' regional cooperation, but did not guarantee that Estonia or Latvia would come to Lithuania's aid in case of armed conflict with Poland over the Vilnius region.

After negotiations with Poland broke down, Lithuania limited itself to occasional diplomatic contacts with Poland, and continued to look at all other international political developments entirely through the prism of the Vilnius question. Lithuania faced a diplomatic conundrum, since it was ostensibly seeking two contradictory foreign policy goals: Lithuania wanted to revise existing borders in the case of Vilnius, but in the case of Klaipėda, it argued for maintenance of the status quo. It was difficult for Lithuanian diplomats to make their case when the two situations required contradictory arguments.

As the political situation in Europe changed, the Russians reached a rapprochement with Poland. When the Russians signed a non-aggression treaty with Poland in July 1932, the Soviet guarantees to Lithuania regarding Vilnius were essentially null and void. Furthermore, Kaunas was getting nervous about increasing German sabre-rattling. That is why Lithuania initiated some unofficial communications with Warsaw in 1934. Foreign Minister Stasys Lozoraitis and General of the Lithuanian Army Stasys Raštikis began to modernize the diplomatic service and the army, and to prepare a new national security strategy. Lozoraitis reasoned that maintaining independence should be Lithuania's primary foreign policy goal,

so for him reaching a *modus vivendi* with Poland was essential, given the threat that Germany posed.

In April 1935, Lozoraitis handed President Smetona a secret memorandum in which he set out his thoughts: we have Klaipėda, although it is under threat; we do not have Vilnius and there is no hope of reclaiming it in the near future. We cannot fight on two diplomatic fronts, so Lithuania needs to mend ties with the Poles and make use of this united front in the struggle against Germany. In the military sphere, Raštikis probed the possibilities of cooperation with Latvia and Estonia and he was in favour of a military alliance between the three countries, but Smetona and Prime Minister Tūbelis were of the opinion that such an alliance would not be useful to Lithuania.

Contacts with Polish Foreign Minister Józef Beck were initiated but led nowhere. In January 1936, Beck made a speech berating Lithuania, and in March of that year Smetona responded in kind, slamming the door on compromise. While talks were stalemated, on 11 March 1938, there was an incident at the administration line: a Lithuanian border policeman shot a Polish soldier who crossed the line. Even though the Poles had shot seven Lithuanian border policemen in similar incidents in the past, Warsaw whipped up anti-Lithuanian hysteria, at a time when Germany was in the process of annexing Austria. On 17 March, Lithuania was given an ultimatum by Poland, demanding establishment of diplomatic relations. Anything but an unequivocal acceptance of all its terms would lead to war.

The politicians in Kaunas had been expecting an ultimatum and they were themselves looking for ways to repair relations. The French and British advised Lithuania to accede to Polish demands, as did the Russians and Germans. In a cabinet meeting, General Raštikis said that the army would fight if ordered to do so, but he was under no illusion what the outcome of such a battle would be, and therefore he favoured a peaceful solution. Since the ultimatum did not require Lithuania to recognize the annexation of Vilnius by Poland, on 19 March, Lithuania conceded and agreed to it. Although thousands of hotheads filled the streets of Polish cities chanting "*Marsz na Kowno*" (March on Kaunas), Polish officials contented themselves with acceptance of the ultimatum.

This was a severe blow to Lithuania's national pride. Lithuanians had to stop commemorating 9 October as "Loss of Vilnius Day". They had to allow a Polish embassy in Kaunas and to open a Lithuanian embassy in Warsaw

Lithuanian Army soldiers on parade in 1937.

and even a Lithuanian consulate in Vilnius. They had to disband the patriotic organization *Vilniui vaduoti sąjunga* (Vilnius Liberation Union), which had 700,000 members, and to stop publication of the journal *Mūsų Vilnius* (Our Vilnius). Despite the establishment of diplomatic relations, cooperation between Lithuania and Poland did not improve. Lithuania considered this to be a tactical withdrawal and in the revised constitution of May 1938, the article stating that the capital of Lithuania is Vilnius remained.

When the government accepted Poland's ultimatum, the cabinet of ministers of Prime Minister Tūbelis stood down and Tūbelis was replaced as prime minister by another close associate of Smetona – Fr Vladas Mironas, a Catholic priest. He dismissed Lozoraitis, whose faction had lost, but the government of Lithuania tried to act as if nothing significant had happened. However, the government's capitulation to the ultimatum consolidated the ranks of Smetona's opponents. The leaders of the Christian Democrats and the Peasant Populist Union formed an alliance and had discussions about a joint platform. They were joined by the ultra-radical Voldemarist Nationalists. As of the end of 1938, this alliance sharply criticized Smetona, whose authority was waning. They published their critical articles in Klaipėda, where local autonomy did not permit the government to censor their publications. The formation of this alliance following a crisis caused by foreign interference showed that the opposition parties had changed their tactics.

First Trial of Nazis in Europe and the Loss of Klapėda

One of Lithuania's most serious problems was the unsuccessful integration of the autonomous Klaipėda region. Pro-German political parties consistently won majorities of about 80 percent to the local parliament, most of the population was Lutheran rather than Catholic, and even many Lithuanian-speakers did not necessarily identify with greater Lithuania, which was less developed economically and whose government they viewed as heavy-handed. Klaipėda's German directorate was more inclined to listen to what Germany said. The two German Nazi organizations in Klaipėda spread propaganda directed against the Lithuanian government and prepared for an uprising and annexation by Germany. They terrorized Lithuanian meetings and attacked Jews. Klaipėda was slipping from Lithuanian control. In an effort to quell seditious activity, the Law on the Protection of Nation and State was passed on 8 February 1934. Actions directed against the state, including insulting the Lithuanian nation and government, demonstrating disrespect for its national symbols and flag, or collaborating with a foreign government against the interests of Lithuania, were now punishable by law.

The government of Lithuania assiduously gathered evidence and conducted searches, during which 1,104 firearms (belonging to 805 Nazi organization members) and great quantities of inflammatory literature were discovered. On 13 July 1934, Nazi organizations were banned and their leaders arrested. Charges were brought against 126 Germans. The trial, which lasted from December 1934 to March 1935 in Kaunas, was the first trial, unprecedented in Europe, of German Nazis for activities directed against the state. The proceedings of the Neumann-Sass trial, as it became known for the leaders of the two Nazi parties in the Klaipėda region, were followed by many journalists from Western Europe and even the United States. This enabled them to get a deeper knowledge of the terrorist and propaganda activities of the Nazis and to inform their readers about the danger they represented. The indictment filled 500 typewritten pages and 20 trunks of evidence lined the courtroom walls. The physical evidence included swastikas, flags, storm troopers' uniforms, instructions, leaflets and weapons. Most of the accused stated that they were admirers of Nazism. They considered Klaipėda to be part of Germany and that as chapters of

Trial of the Klaipėda Nazis in Kaunas, December 1934.

the main party they received their orders from Nazis in Germany. They said their orders came from Nazi leaders Walter R. Hess, East Prussian District President (*Oberpräsident*) Erich Koch, and the German consulate in Klaipėda. The trial was completed on 26 March 1935, and 76 of the accused were found guilty; four received the death penalty. This created a crisis in relations with Germany, which imposed a trade embargo on Lithuania and exerted political pressure through propaganda and other means. The French and British also urged leniency. As a result, in order not to worsen relations with Germany, President Smetona commuted the death sentences to life sentences, and, by 1938, all of those sentenced were amnestied.

A plebiscite in Saarland, which restored this territory to Germany, alarmed the leaders of Lithuania. Smetona privately referred to Hitler in 1935 as a "dangerous political madman", who was capable of destroying half of Europe to achieve his ideological goals.

After the Munich Agreement in 1938, the state of martial law in the Klaipėda region was revoked and Lithuania no longer controlled the situation. Even though the Lithuanian government had made significant investments in the Klaipėda region (42 million litas were invested in the port alone, although Lithuania had as yet received revenues of only

11 million litas), it became evident that there were no resources for additional investments and the Lithuanian government's influence in the region waned. The law guaranteeing equality of the two languages in the autonomous district was a fiction: Lithuanian was used only in Lithuanian firms and organizations. Nazi sympathizers predominated in German firms and in almost all schools the lessons were in German. Attempts to provide lessons in Lithuanian for students of Lithuanian origin were not successful, nor were attempts to have Lithuanian spoken in the workplace. The Germans effectively stymied the integration of the Klaipėda region into Lithuania.

The government of Lithuania found insufficient internal support in the Klaipėda region. The local Germans did not like being an ethnic minority and they considered Lithuanian rule to be just a passing phase. Kaunas could have relied on the support of internal migrants to Klaipėda from the rest of Lithuania, but these were mostly simple people, workers who were not highly educated. And for complex social, political and psychological reasons, Lithuania lost the support of many Lithuanian-speaking natives of the district, the ones who identified themselves as natives of Klaipėda rather than as Lithuanians, many of whom voted for German parties in the local government elections. In many respects, the Klaipėda region was more similar to Latvia and Estonia in its development than to other parts of Lithuania. The average index of wellbeing and culture (literacy, public libraries, health care, consumer goods and other indicators, taking a per capita average) for the Baltic countries was 100, but Estonia's score was 132, Latvia's – 138, the Klaipėda region's – 137, while Lithuania's was 59. So Klaipėda did not "adhere" to Lithuania at least partly because of Lithuania's lower standard of development.

Unfortunately, at the beginning of 1939, when Germany was already planning to annex Klaipėda, the British and French (co-signatories of the Klaipėda Convention) declared that they would not guarantee the status quo in Klaipėda, and without their help, Lithuania could not defend it. On 20 March, the Germans issued an ultimatum to hand the Klaipėda territory over to them. Unless the ultimatum was accepted, they threatened to take it by force. At a cabinet meeting lasting five hours, Smetona asked military officers how long Lithuania could resist the invaders. When Generals Kazys Musteikis and Raštikis agreed that the answer would be "not even three days", Lithuania accepted the ultimatum.

Adolf Hitler in Klaipėda on 23 March 1939 being greeted by local Nazi sympathizers and storm troopers.

On 23 March, Lithuania and Germany signed a treaty transferring the Klaipėda territory to German sovereignty. Hitler sailed to Klaipėda on a military vessel and from a theatre balcony addressed the jubilant local Germans. The entire Lithuanian nation was greatly upset, because the dominant mood had been to resist. The economic blow to Lithuania was enormous: although Klaipėda accounted for only 6% of Lithuania's territory and 5% of its inhabitants, its loss meant the loss of one third of Lithuania's economy. Moreover, 70% of Lithuania's exports went through Klaipėda.

The Christian Democrats and the Peasant Popular Union were conditionally returned to power after the annexation of Klaipėda. The government of Jonas Černius, who became prime minister in March 1939, was styled a solidarity government, since two ministers each were chosen from the opposition parties. But they were not representatives of their parties in the cabinet. Parties were still officially banned, and the government and the opposition had differing views on how they were to work together. In the eyes of the authoritarian government, working together was supposed to proceed not along party lines but on the basis of individual competence. Since the president had the power to set the government's work agenda, the opposition's ministers had to follow the president's orders.

When yet another cabinet was formed in November 1939, the Christian Democrats and the Peasant Populist Union did not request that their parties be legalized, and once again acceded to have two representatives each in the new government formed by Prime Minister Antanas Merkys, a member of the National Union. This was a politics of compromise, but national unity was necessary, because there were very difficult times ahead.

The Politics of Neutrality and the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact

As the European order created by the Treaty of Versailles began falling apart, and the League of Nations could no longer guarantee its members' security, the foreign ministers of the three Baltic countries agreed in the summer of 1938 that they would not allow foreign armies to cross their territory, and that they would remain neutral in any conflict between their more powerful neighbours. Lithuania passed its neutrality law on 10 January 1939. However, for the moment there were no major political developments abroad, so Lithuania continued manoeuvring among Warsaw, Moscow and Berlin, taking pains not to get involved in any military conflict. In April 1939, General of the Lithuanian Army Raštikis attended Hitler's 50th birthday party, and in May he visited Poland at the invitation of Marshall Edward Rydz-Śmigły. As relations between the great powers deteriorated, in May Lithuanian diplomats were instructed to observe strict neutrality "in every situation and on every question".

As it tried to protect the country by clinging to neutrality, the government in Kaunas was shocked by news of the signing of the Treaty of Non-Aggression between Germany and the USSR (the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact) on 23 August 1939. In addition to stipulations of non-aggression, Nazi Germany and the USSR agreed in a secret protocol to divide the region into spheres of influence: Finland, Estonia and Latvia were to go to the Soviets, whereas Lithuania was to go to Germany. A second secret protocol drawn up the next month amended the first, and reassigned most of Lithuania to the Soviet Union. Although the secret protocol was not officially revealed until after Germany's defeat in 1945, within days the Baltic States strongly suspected its existence. Both parties recognized Lithuania's interests in the Vilnius region, but the borders were not specified. The Nationalist Party (Voldemarists), Riflemen's Union (*Šauliai*) and

General of the Lithuanian Army Stasys Raštikis (centre) and General Jonas Černius (right) on manoeuvres in 1938.

Young National Union members accused the government of impotence and after Germany attacked Poland, they urged the government to take Vilnius by force. Germany, too, urged Lithuania to march on Vilnius, promising to support its armed forces with planes, tanks and artillery. Considering Polish military setbacks in the war with Germany, Lithuania could probably have taken Vilnius without German help, but the Lithuanian government considered a march on Vilnius to be not a military problem but a political one. The Lithuanian government assured the Poles that not one Lithuanian soldier would cross the administration line. Otherwise, Lithuania would have been viewed as an aggressor, which would have soured relations with the British and the French. The Soviets also advised against seizing Vilnius.

On 17 September, when the USSR invaded Poland, the Lithuanian president demonstrated Lithuania's resolve to defend its independence by proclaiming a partial mobilization. Lithuania's army increased from 24,000 to 89,470 men. However, when Vyacheslav Molotov and Joachim von Ribbentrop signed a treaty of border recognition and friendship between the Third Reich and the USSR on September 28, with its secret protocol assigning the territory of Lithuania to the USSR's sphere of influence (for which Germany received the province of Lublin in return), Germany's pressure on Lithuania ceased instantly.

Lithuanian troops enter Vilnius in late October, 1939.

Moscow, however, then began to act. Molotov invited Minister Juozas Urbšys to come to Moscow. This took place on 2 October. On the eve of his trip, a partial demobilization of Lithuania's army was begun. This was a risky undertaking, because if the situation turned critical there might be no time to mobilize again. In Moscow, on 3 October, Joseph Stalin pressured Urbšys to sign a mutual assistance agreement, a treaty for the transfer of the city of Vilnius and the Vilnius region to Lithuanian control, and another treaty ceding some territory in southwestern Lithuania to Germany. The final element shocked the Lithuanian delegation, since the clear majority of the approximately 150,000 inhabitants of the area were ethnically Lithuanian. They were difficult negotiations. Urbšys had to fly to Kaunas for consultations, because the Soviets were also demanding the right to establish military bases in Lithuania. Instead of allowing Soviet bases, Lithuania argued, it could increase the size of its own army, arming it with heavy weapons and coordinating joint movements by creating a joint military commission, that way basically maintaining its neutrality. Stalin replied that Lithuania would only be neutral for so long as he wanted it to be.

Negotiations were made more difficult by the fact that at the beginning of October the Soviets had already forced the Estonians and Latvians through similar agreements to accept Soviet military bases. The Lithu-

anians tried persistently to avoid having bases, to keep their ethnic lands and to recover some additional parts of the Vilnius region that were inhabited by Lithuanians. At first the Soviets demanded the entry of 50,000 soldiers, but they reduced the number to 20,000. The Lithuanians, by now convinced that nobody would help them and that Germany had let Lithuania pass into the USSR's sphere of influence, with Stalin and Molotov aggressively breathing down their necks, signed a treaty for the transfer of the city of Vilnius and the Vilnius region to Lithuanian control, and a mutual assistance agreement between the USSR and Lithuania in Moscow on 10 October. Although the mutual assistance pact referred to the Lithuanian-Russian treaties of 1920 and 1926 as the basis for bilateral relations, some articles of the pact potentially threatened Lithuania's independence. Lithuania acquired 6,700 km² of territory with Vilnius and about half a million residents. This was only about 20% of what should have been recovered had the USSR adhered to the borders agreed to in the peace treaty of 1920, and for this Lithuania had to allow Soviet military bases on its territory. Berlin and Moscow decided to leave the question of southwestern Lithuania in abeyance for the moment. (On 10 January 1941, according to another secret agreement, the USSR bought the area from Germany for 7.5 million gold dollars.)

The mutual assistance agreement fundamentally changed Lithuania's international situation: Lithuania lost its neutral political status and a degree of its sovereignty. Only the recovery of Vilnius, Lithuania's historic capital, was a ray of sunshine in an otherwise bleak situation. Lithuania had become dependent on the USSR, leading people to quip: "*Vilnius mūsų, o mes rusų*" (Vilnius belongs to us, but we belong to the Russians). Germany reiterated that it had no interests in the region; Britain and France were at war with Germany; and a defeated Poland had very little influence left in the region.

The USSR's Ultimatum of 1940 and Soviet Occupation

After allowing the establishment of Soviet bases, Lithuania had to forego its ambition of being elected to the Council of the League of Nations. The Baltic countries avoided condemning the USSR for its aggression against Finland, even though the USSR had been expelled from

the League of Nations for that aggression. Germany severely restricted Lithuania's ability to trade with the UK and tried to monopolize Lithuania's foreign trade. It was too late to forge a Baltic union with Latvia and Estonia. Lithuania had its hands full trying to integrate the Vilnius region into Lithuanian proper. At that time Lithuania was lodging and provisioning more than ten thousand interned Polish soldiers and officers, as well as 12,000 Polish Jewish refugees. The Lithuanian currency had to be introduced in place of the now worthless zloty, the unemployed needed to be provided with sustenance and jobs had to be found for them, and people had to be issued new documents. At the time, Vilnius was a predominantly Polish town, and about a third of the population was Jewish. The Poles were hostile to the new Lithuanian administration when the city began to change its appearance, especially once Lithuanian signs started to be substituted for Polish ones, Lithuanian language courses were instituted, and the Polish Stephen Báthory University was closed. Due to this hostility the Lithuanian government held off transferring ministries and other government institutions from Kaunas to Vilnius. Housing and provisioning the 20,000 Red Army soldiers stationed in Lithuania was also a demanding task.

By the end of May 1940, the Soviets' promised non-interference in Lithuania's internal affairs came to an end. Moscow publicly accused Lithuania of kidnapping soldiers from the Soviet bases. The Soviets refused to acknowledge Lithuanian offers of cooperation, and when the alleged kidnapping victims turned up, the Lithuanians were not allowed to question them. It was clear that these accusations were just a pretext, and soon the Soviets invited Lithuanian Prime Minister Merkys to Moscow. In view of this obvious threat, President Smetona authorized Merkys to sign whatever documents were necessary, but without breaching the agreement reached with the Soviet Union on 10 October 1939.

From the moment he arrived in Moscow on 7 June 1940, Merkys was shocked by Molotov's brutal behaviour toward him. Molotov absurdly accused Lithuania of anti-Soviet policies, of kidnappings of soldiers that had never happened, including allegations that the "kidnap victims" were interrogated and tortured, and of concluding a non-existent anti-Soviet military pact with Latvia and Estonia. Molotov objected to an anti-Soviet caricature in a Lithuanian newspaper, even to an article that Merkys had written. Molotov would not accept any explanations and he insisted

Occupation: a Soviet tank in Kaunas on 15 June 1940.
Photograph by George Birman.

that the people to blame for the "provocations" – Internal Affairs Minister General Kazys Skučas and Security Department Director Augustinas Povilaitis – had to be dismissed from their posts. The absurdity of Molotov's shrill accusations caused Merkys to break down psychologically. On 10 June, when Kaunas heard that Merkys had not been able to normalize the situation, Minister Urbšys was sent to Moscow. But neither Urbšys, nor Smetona's conciliatory letter to the Chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet Mikhail Kalinin, nor the dismissal of the two high-ranking Lithuanian officials did any good. On 14 June – the same day the Wehrmacht marched into Paris – at 11:45 pm, Urbšys received a hand-delivered ultimatum from Molotov which demanded that Lithuania let Soviet army units enter Lithuania in unlimited numbers unfettered by any agreement, that the government be replaced by a pro-Soviet one, that the "guilty" officials be punished, and that a response be given by 10 o'clock in the morning the next day (15 June). Molotov then told Urbšys verbally that whatever Lithuania's response would be, Red Army units were going to invade Lithuania.

The USSR had prepared for the invasion. Near the border they had established field hospitals for those who would be injured and prepared prison camps to house the foreseen prisoners of war. Earlier that spring, the Soviets had secretly stationed in Lithuanian cities special diversion-

ary espionage groups whose members had been trained to speak Lithuanian and were ready to assume power locally. Just before the invasion, the Russians had commenced an air and sea blockade of the Baltic countries. On the morning of 15 June, they attacked several Lithuanian border posts, killing one border policeman and kidnapping another, and disarmed the guards at other posts.

Throughout the night of 15 June the government deliberated whether to oppose the occupation or to accept the ultimatum. The Christian Democrats and Populists, who had reached an agreement beforehand, demanded that Merkys be replaced by General Raštikis as prime minister. This was another blow to Smetona, having the prime minister he appointed toppled by the opposition in the face of an ultimatum, although he did approve of Raštikis's candidacy. But the president of Lithuania found that he no longer had the power to appoint ministers: the Soviets immediately rejected Raštikis's candidacy. Smetona's proposal for armed resistance was supported by only two ministers. The military men present (General Vincas Vitkauskas and General Raštikis) explained that, on its own, Lithuania would be unable to offer any serious resistance to the Soviet war machine, and there would be countless casualties, including civilians, and that much of the country would be laid to waste. The majority of the ministers felt a country as small as Lithuania could ill afford such a steep sacrifice of its people in a fight they were sure to lose. The cabinet members also could not foresee that they would be incorporated into the Soviet Union, rather than simply becoming a satellite nation and retaining a semblance of statehood. The government accepted the ultimatum.

In the afternoon of 15 June 1940, crudely violating all bilateral agreements that it had with Lithuania, the USSR ordered a large military contingent – the 3rd and 11th armies – to enter and occupy Lithuania. Meanwhile, military aircraft packed with troops were landing at Lithuania's airports. Only then did the Lithuanian public hear on the radio about the ultimatum, the Lithuanian government's acceptance of it, and the invasion of the Red Army. When he heard the news that Soviet tanks were already rolling through the streets of Kaunas, heading toward the most important ministry buildings, President Smetona declared that he would not participate in the Sovietization of Lithuania. "As a small protest", he claimed illness and handed over the post of president to Merkys. Together with Defence Minister General Kazys Musteikis and their families, they

hurriedly left Kaunas for Germany. The president hoped to be politically more useful abroad.

Some of the opposition were glad that Smetona's regime had ended and held out hope for new developments. But they had not yet realized that this was not only the end of Smetona's rule, but also of Lithuania's independence. They could not imagine that their future (whether with Smetona or without him) no longer depended on the Lithuanians themselves. Optimists still believed that satellite status for Lithuania was possible, given that no blood had been spilled resisting the Soviets. But the naïve and overly optimistic were wrong.

Chapter V

LITHUANIA: THE SOVIET AND NAZI OCCUPATIONS

IN THE CLUTCHES OF STALIN AND HITLER

The brief period of friendship between the communist Soviet Union and Nazi Germany approached its inevitable end in the early 1940's, as both totalitarian states prepared for the conquest of Europe. Lithuania stood in the path of these competing military giants when World War II started. The country was forced to contemplate its chances of survival not only as a state, but also as a nation. The thought "Would we be better off under the Russians or the Germans?" did not indicate premature defeatism, merely a realistic evaluation of the chances of a small state. The issue was at the centre of heated discussions not only in cafés, but also in government offices. Many countries had already been occupied by the Nazis, Poland had been divided by both predators, and the Baltic countries therefore understood that their turn was coming. The possibility of coming under Russian rule and thus living through the hardships of war was imagined as a temporary return to the Russia of Nicholas II, without any realization of the nature of the totalitarian Soviet Bolshevik regime. The regime ruled through terror and brute force, isolating and destroying its opponents as well as political and social groups it considered to be incompatible with its ideology.

The Soviet Union took advantage of the international situation and the world's attention on the German invasion of Paris not only to occupy Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia in the summer of 1940, but also to incorporate them forcibly into the USSR within several weeks, establishing so-called "people's democracies", which were anything but democratic. It was the start of a period of two successive occupations by totalitarian regimes that would destroy all who opposed them as well as anyone whose political, social or racial affiliations displeased them. As the front retreated and the war ended, the Soviet armed forces returned and turned their weapons on Lithuanian partisans, the "forest brothers". It took nearly a decade for them to suppress the armed resistance in Lithuania. Unable to defend their in-

dependence, the Lithuanians chose other ways to survive, resist and try to save the nation and its language and culture, waiting for the time to come when Lithuanian statehood could be restored. The aspirations of the Lithuanian nation to live in a state of their own would be realized only at the end of the Cold War, when the country succeeded in restoring its independence for the second time in the 20th century. Lithuania regained international recognition, once again becoming a fully fledged member of democratic Europe and the Western world.

The Sovietization of Lithuania

On 16 June 1940, Soviet divisions strategically cut off Latvia and Estonia from Germany by marching through Lithuania. They then occupied the two neighbouring Baltic states with lightning speed. From then on, the three small countries shared very similar destinies. Real governing power no longer belonged to the ministers who remained but to Vladimir Dekanozov, the emissary of the Soviet government who arrived from Moscow on the afternoon of 15 June. Accompanying him was the first deputy to Internal Affairs Commissar Lavrentiy Beria, Vsevolod Merkulov, who called himself "Comrade Petrov", and who as a member of Soviet intelligence acted behind the scenes. Dekanozov was also assisted by the Soviet legation, headed by Plenipotentiary Envoy (Rus. *polpred*) Nikolai Pozdnyakov and by the small Communist Party of Lithuania (CPL), which had been operating underground until then. The tens of thousands of Soviet troops deployed in the country helped shape the course of future events.

After a number of small European countries were occupied by Germany, it was hard to expect that Lithuania would remain untouched by the Nazi and Soviet conspiracy. When hope disappeared that "maybe the Soviets will not occupy us", another hope remained, that "maybe they will not Sovietize us". But that, too, was a false hope. Under Dekanozov's instructions, the departure of Antanas Smetona was explained as the president's resignation and thus the impression was created that Antanas Merkys became the president legitimately. This was necessary because the Lithuanian Constitution did not grant an acting president the right to appoint a new head of government. This was how a cleverly conceived transitional puppet People's Government emerged on 17 June. It included well-known intellectuals who had been critics of Smetona's regime. Communist sympathizer

and populist journalist Justas Paleckis was appointed Prime Minister and writer Vincas Krėvė-Mickevičius was named his deputy and Minister of Foreign Affairs. Ernestas Galvanauskas and General Vincas Vitkauskas remained Minister of Finance and Minister of National Defence respectively. The new government announced that the only reason for increasing the number of Soviet troops in the country was to strengthen Lithuania's security and that no significant changes had taken place. This was just the impression that the Soviets sought to create. But anxious rumours spread, and it was necessary to reassure the public that land ownership would not be affected and that "the Lithuanian Army remains and, if required, will defend Lithuania's independence and freedom".

In fact, the People's Government was Soviet-controlled, and from the very first days undermined Lithuania's sovereignty by changing the make-up of the government. Key government positions were entrusted to communists – former political prisoners who were amnestied. The CPL's leader, Antanas Sniečkus, became director of the State Security Department and Mečislovas Gedvilas was appointed Minister of the Interior. The CPL was legalized on 25 June 1940, although other political parties were not. The so-called "Smetona's Seimas" was dissolved and all non-communist organizations, newspapers and magazines were closed. The People's Government abolished the Lithuanian-Vatican Concordat on 27 June, and under pressure from Dekanozov decided on 12 July to transfer Lithuania's gold that was kept abroad to the State Bank of the Soviet Union. However, only the gold stored in Swedish and Swiss banks was actually transferred.

Moscow began implementing the USSR's management model in government offices, the police system and the courts. A "people's militia" was organized. On 3 July, the Law on the Reform of the Lithuanian Army was adopted and it was transformed into the People's Army (later it became the 29th Rifle Corps of the Red Army). On 11 July, the Lithuanian Riflemen's Union was abolished and its members disarmed. County supervisors, district heads and police chiefs were dismissed from office, and their posts were given to Soviet sympathizers. When communists gained a majority in the government, preparations began for the incorporation of Lithuania into the USSR.

Annexation was implemented by rigging elections to the so-called People's Seimas, with the same scenario staged in Latvia and Estonia. Only the Communist Party, the Communist Youth League, the International

Organization for Aid to Revolutionaries (commonly known by its Russian acronym MOPR) and communist-led trade unions could nominate candidates for office, and only one candidate for each place to be filled was proposed. The 79 nominated candidates (in the rush, one deceased person's name was placed on the ballot) represented the mythical Lithuanian Working People's Union (LWPU). Half of them were select members of the Communist Party and the rest were communist sympathizers ("non-party communists"). During the election campaign, the authorities criticized and denigrated Smetona's regime and spread propaganda. Lies were told that the election would be democratic, that Lithuania would remain independent and that the litas would be preserved, while rumours about the nationalization of land and the establishment of collective farms were denied. Public statements were made that "persons who abstain from voting are enemies of the people", a term heretofore applied to National Unionists and former high-ranking officials. Just before the election, on 11–12 July, the puppet government arrested several hundred of the country's well-known public figures.

According to official data, 95 percent of the electorate participated in the election of 14–15 July to the People's Seimas (a stamp certifying that a person voted was affixed in his passport), with 99.19% of them voting for the candidates of the Lithuanian Working People's Union. According to the election law, candidates had to receive a majority of votes to win. Half the candidates polled less than half the votes, but the regime announced that they were all elected. Thus the election results were fraudulent. A similar farce took place in Latvia and Estonia.

The "parliaments" of the three Baltic countries that gathered for their sessions on 21 July were strikingly synchronous in declaring themselves Soviet Socialist Republics. On 22 July, the so-called Lithuanian People's Seimas adopted a declaration that all Lithuanian land was henceforth nationalized, thus making all farmers tenants on the land. Banks and large industrial enterprises were also nationalized. The People's Seimas elected a 20-member delegation headed by Paleckis that went to Moscow on 3 August and requested that Lithuania be incorporated into the USSR, alleging that this was voluntary. That was how the annexation of Lithuania was formalized and the Soviets' imperialist ambitions satisfied. Since the People's Seimas installed by the occupiers was not granted the authority by the Lithuanian nation in free elections to abolish Lithuania's statehood and

Election campaign poster for the People's Seimas, July 1940.

request incorporation into the USSR, its decisions were illegitimate. All Lithuanian diplomats in foreign countries who protested the occupation and annexation were deprived of their citizenship, and their property in Lithuania was nationalized. Lithuanians in the USA also protested.

The camouflage of voluntariness was abandoned as Lithuania was converted into a constituent part of the USSR. The administrative system was modeled on that of the Soviet Union. The People's Seimas was renamed the Supreme Council of the Lithuanian SSR on 25 August and the Council of People's Commissars was formally approved the next day to replace the People's Government as the executive branch of the government. The Soviet constitution was confirmed, identical to the so-called "Stalin Constitution" adopted in the Soviet Union in 1936. All Lithuanian institutions, especially the NKVD (the People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs), were

filled with "specialists" who arrived from the USSR to impose the Soviet system. However, there was still an internal border between Lithuania and the rest of the Soviet Union.

As the Soviets implemented their agricultural reforms, farmers who had owned more than 30 ha were dispossessed. Such farmers were considered kulaks (wealthy peasant farmers) and "enemies of the people". Attempts were made to eliminate them through a threefold increase in taxes. Landless and land-poor peasants could receive up to 10 ha of land. Land that remained in the state fund was to be used for the establishment of collective farms. Industrial enterprises that employed more than 20 people were nationalized. Soon there were shortages of raw materials and finished goods. Queues became a permanent feature of Soviet socialism. Prices jumped as soon as the rouble was introduced alongside the litas in the autumn of 1940. Personal savings depreciated in value and people lost all their deposits as banks were nationalized. The secret police (NKVD) used terror to entrench the Soviet system: night-time arrests were commonplace and people were imprisoned or exiled. Even Soviet sympathizers had to bite their tongues – they learned about Bolshevism the hard way, by living under it.

Repression and the Anti-Soviet June Uprising of 1941

Repressive actions, arrests, deportations and fear formed an integral part of Bolshevik policy. On 6 July 1940, Antanas Sniečkus, Director of the State Security Department, issued an order authorizing the arrest of those who spoke out against the People's Government. The "operational liquidation plan" for eliminating the leadership of Lithuanian political parties and the Riflemen's Union was approved, lists of people to be arrested were drawn up, and troops of the Soviet NKVD were assigned to prevent them from escaping to Germany. During the first mass arrests from 10–17 July, well-known politicians and public figures of independent Lithuania were imprisoned. They included the last prime minister, Antanas Merkys, and the foreign minister Juozas Urbšys, who were both exiled with their families to the depths of the USSR. Those arrested were proclaimed outlaws and their property was confiscated. Within a year of the Soviet occupation, 6,606 people accused of political offences were arrested. In April–June 1941, half of them were deported, primarily to Siberia.

The occupation authorities carried out the first mass deportation of the Lithuanian population from 14–18 June 1941, deporting 17,500 people. The Soviets were assisted by local workers, mostly Communist Party members and particularly Communist Youth Union (Komsomol) members. Lithuania's political, military and economic elite were exiled, including former Lithuanian president Aleksandras Stulginskis, former prime minister Pranas Dovydaitis, many other ministers, hundreds of teachers, 79 priests and leaders of ethnic minorities. Most of the exiles were Lithuanians, while Jews constituted 13% (2,045) and Poles 10% (1,576). There were 5,060 children under 16 years of age among the exiles. This unprecedented mass deportation shocked Lithuanians because the expulsions aimed to physically destroy whole families. Under the Nazi occupation, this mass June deportation was used to promote anti-Semitic feelings by associating Jews with communism and blaming them for the deportation, even though the Jews themselves suffered severely during the Soviet occupation. Jewish commercial banks, factories, trade enterprises and private property were nationalized. The deportation of exiles to places with extreme climatic conditions near the Arctic Ocean and in the Altai region of Siberia without adequate shelter, clothing, or food should be regarded as a crime against humanity. Many of the exiles died or were killed.

After war broke out between Germany and the Soviet Union on 22 June 1941, Lithuania was occupied by the Germans within three days. During their hasty withdrawal, the Soviets managed to evacuate only some political prisoners from Lithuania. Those who could not be evacuated in time were killed. The mass murder of prisoners occurred at the prison colony in Pravieniškės (where about 230 people were put to death) and near Rainiai (where 76 people were killed after being brutally tortured). Similar events occurred on a smaller scale in several other counties. The total number killed was about 700. Many prisoners were freed by the Lithuanian resistance when the June Uprising of 1941 broke out at the very start of the German-Soviet war. The massacres by the Soviets opened an era of mass murders in Lithuania. When Germany attacked the Soviet Union, hatred for the Soviet regime and its reign of terror, anger at the nationalization of property, anger for the arrests, deportations and murders, spilled out into the open. That is why many Lithuanians welcomed the German army's (*Wehrmacht*) entry into the country, some even with flowers in their hands.

Prisoners and superintendents of Pravieniškės Camp murdered by the Soviets on 26 June 1941.

As the German army invaded Lithuanian territory, an uprising broke out on 22 June and spread throughout Lithuania within a few days. The uprising was largely a spontaneous response to Soviet actions in Lithuania but partly it was planned. Even before Germany attacked the Soviet Union, the idea of an anti-Soviet uprising was nurtured by the Lithuanian Activists' Front (LAF), which was formed in Berlin by Kazys Škirpa, the former Lithuanian envoy there, and a group of Lithuanian emigrants in November 1940. The LAF (with centres in Vilnius and Kaunas) considered itself the main organizer of the uprising. The activists gathered news from Soviet-controlled Lithuania and sent various instructions through messengers from Germany, with details on how the future uprising was to proceed. The goal was to restore Lithuania's statehood. Since the military part of the LAF collaborated with the *Abwehr* (German military intelligence), instructions were given to first secure bridges, key railway junctions, airports, factories and other strategic sites. The LAF leadership relied too much on Nazi Germany, believing that "in the new Europe led by Germany, all nations will be granted the right to manage their own countries as they want".

Škirpa believed that the new organization needed to maintain especially close ties with Nazi Germany. The LAF's programme and other documents did not avoid nationalist rhetoric and anti-Semitism (article 16 of the programme stated that "the Lithuanian Activists' Front revokes the welcome

Kaunas residents welcome the *Wehrmacht* troops in 1941.
Photo reproduced by Romas Mičiūnas.

extended towards the Jewish ethnic minority in Lithuania" and article 23 calls for a "radical reform of Lithuanian cities" with the goal of increasing the number of Lithuanians in the cities (a reference in part to the confiscation of Jewish property). Nonetheless, the German government prohibited Lithuanians from forming a Lithuanian government in the event of war or publishing any appeal to the people "without having received the consent of the competent German authorities." Insurgents in occupied Kaunas, however, confronted the Germans with a *fait accompli* – having captured the radio station, LAF representative Leonas Prapuolenis announced on 23 June 1941 that: "The provisional government of the newly reviving Lithuania hereby declares the restoration of a free and independent Lithuania". Further, he stated that "the young state of Lithuania enthusiastically undertakes to contribute to organizing Europe on a new foundation". He was generous with sympathetic words for Nazi Germany, which "saved European culture and civilization" from the Red Terror, and invited Lithuanians to take up arms and help the German army. The rebels' main aim was to restore the independent state of Lithuania.

The insurgency in provincial areas in Lithuania was primarily spontaneous. Even before the *Wehrmacht* troops entered Lithuania, rebel groups started to open fire on withdrawing Soviet troops, and they also took over local government buildings and arrested activists of the Soviet regime.

Lithuanian control was restored not only in Kaunas, but also in many other cities, including Vilnius. Small towns were liberated and national flags were flown. The Germans allowed the Lithuanians to run local government for the time being, because there was no alternative: the military did not have the capacity to administer civilian institutions. The rebels numbered about 10,000–15,000 men; approximately 600 were killed fighting the Bolsheviks. Most of the partisans were young. Among them were many students, intellectuals, farmers, workers, and soldiers.

As the Nazis did not allow LAF head Kazys Škirpa to leave Berlin and placed him under house arrest, literary historian and lecturer on Lithuanian literature and folklore at the University of Kaunas Juozas Ambrazevičius was appointed head of the newly formed provisional government on 23 June. The provisional government was dominated by people with Christian Democratic leanings. They passed resolutions restoring laws that had been in effect before the Bolshevik occupation, and they restored the Lithuanian judicial system. Public life was again based on private property – land, homes, capital and enterprises were privatized and returned to their rightful owners. However, the restitution laws were not applicable to Jews, non-Lithuanian citizens and those "who had actively participated in activities against the interests of the Lithuanian nation." The provisional government believed it would be dealing with a German occupation regime like the one in 1918, and would be able to manoeuvre as the Lithuanian Council had done. However, it did not realize that the totalitarian Nazi regime was an entirely different kind of enemy and that it professed an ideology that included extermination of peoples based on race and eugenic selection. The provisional government did not subscribe to such theories; rather, its anti-Semitic pronouncements (drawing up provisions regarding the status of Jews and establishing a concentration camp at Fort VII) were made seeking concessions from Nazi Germany. Even so, the Nazis failed to acknowledge the government and most of the more than 100 laws and resolutions that it adopted were therefore not enforced. The provisional government could not control the situation because it could not maintain communications with the whole country – postal, telegraph and telephone services were used only for German military purposes. Even though the German occupation authorities allowed the restoration of the administrative system of counties and municipalities that had existed before 15 June 1940 and the re-establishment of the police, they did not allow the forma-

tion of a regular Lithuanian army from the partisans and Lithuanian military units that had deserted from the Red Army.

The Nazis were dissatisfied with the provisional government and instigated a putsch on the night of July 23 by Augustinas Voldermaras's Nationalist Party, which was submissive to the Gestapo. They removed the LAF's appointees and took command of the battalions and police themselves. Unhindered, the Nazis now gave direct orders to municipalities and the police, as well as the auxiliary police units. They also readily took over the property that had been nationalized by the Soviets and on August 5 prohibited the provisional government from taking any action. Prime Minister Juozas Ambrazevičius ascertained that the government "considers its activity to have been suspended against its will." When most of the ministers refused to become advisers, the Nazis closed the LAF on 26 September. They also closed the Lithuanian Nationalist Party in December. Thus the activities of legal Lithuanian organizations in Nazi-occupied Lithuania ended.

The dismissal of the provisional government shows that it acted above all in the interests of the Lithuanian nation, was established against the will of the German administration, and was not a product of Nazi political intrigue.

The June uprising was a highly important event that destroyed the Soviet myth that Lithuania voluntarily joined the Soviet Union to comply with the will of the Lithuanian people. It was not for nothing that the uprising was condemned by Vyacheslav Molotov on Moscow radio. On the other hand, the events of 22–28 June marked the beginning of another tragic page in the history of the Lithuanian nation: the Nazi occupation that replaced the Soviet regime not only dashed all hopes of restoring Lithuania's independence, but also opened the way for the mass extermination of Lithuania's Jews.

The Annihilation of Lithuania's Jews – the Holocaust

Since Germany occupied Lithuania so rapidly, only a very small part of the population was able to withdraw to the Soviet Union. The Soviets barely had time to evacuate the government of the Lithuanian Soviet Socialist Republic (LSSR) to Moscow. This had disastrous consequences for Jews, as most who tried to escape the Germans were forced to return because they were overtaken by the *Wehrmacht* on the road to Moscow or they were turned back by Soviet soldiers and the NKVD at the

border, since the Soviets considered them to be deserters, panic mongers or spies as soon as they presented their Lithuanian documents. From the first days of the Nazi occupation, part of the Lithuanian population was openly hostile to Lithuanian Jews. In June 1940, Jewish youths sympathetic to communism had greeted the Red Army's entry with flowers in their hands and Russian songs. For them the Red Army meant salvation because it could well have been the *Wehrmacht* that entered instead. When the Soviets began to form their occupation government, young Jews, especially since they readily spoke Russian, were given posts in municipal governments, enterprises, institutions and trade unions. Jews began to be noticed in pro-Soviet demonstrations, in the administration, and among political leaders, which would have been unusual in independent Lithuania. Unable to marshal great support from Lithuanians, the Soviet regime encouraged Jews to become involved, and quite a few found jobs in government agencies, the NKVD and the militia. This fact particularly strengthened anti-Semitic feelings, causing many Lithuanians to stereotype all Jews as traitors of independent Lithuania and its ideals. The sudden intensification of anti-Jewish sentiment caused concern among Moscow's henchmen. On 27 June 1940, Vincas Krėvė-Mickevičius, the Acting Prime Minister of the Moscow-formed People's Government, complained to Lavrentiy Beria's deputy Vsevolod Merkulov that people were indignant about the behaviour of Jews who ignored Lithuania's statehood.

Although Jews were not responsible for either the occupation or Sovietization, their visibility in the occupation government caused them to be associated with the Soviet regime, and the slogan of "the struggle against Judeo-Bolshevism" spread by the Nazi propaganda machine became intertwined with Lithuanians' strong anti-Soviet sentiments. Many Lithuanians, including Jews, were rounded up during the first week of the Nazi occupation as communists and Soviet activists, and several thousands of them were killed during the so-called "clean-up operations" conducted by the *Sicherheitsdienst Einsatzgruppen* (Security Service Deployment Groups: in effect, mobile killing units). Unlike in Western Europe, however, in Lithuania the Nazis began to massacre Jews almost immediately. On 24 June 1941, a group organized by the Tilsit Gestapo shot dead male Jews within a 25 km zone at the Lithuanian-German border and 201 Jews in Gargždai. The following day, 214 Jews were killed in Kretinga and on 27 June, 111 Jews were killed in Palanga. Jews in other locations were also killed.

The mobile units organized their killing to make it appear as if the first pogroms and "clean-up" actions were carried out by local people. They found collaborators among the criminal element and Lithuanians who had suffered at the hands of Soviet terror, sought revenge for perceived injustices or were trying to "wash away sins" committed during the Soviet occupation. Such people were involved in the terrible *Einsatzgruppen*-inspired pogroms in Vilijampolė on 26 June and at the Lietūkis Garage in Kaunas on 27 June, although reports from *Einsatzgruppen* commanders stated that it had not been easy to organize the pogroms. The Germans did not trust the armed partisans who had rebelled against the Soviets, so rebel detachments were dissolved on 28 June, and volunteers were recruited for a National Labour Protection (NLP) Battalion under the Kaunas Military Commandant. One of its companies was made into a special unit (*Sonderkommando*) and participated in the massacre of 3,000 Jews under Nazi command on July 4 and July 6 at Fort VII in Kaunas. These Jews were selected from among the detainees suspected of Soviet sympathies simply because they were Jewish. In the complicated 1939–1941 period, during which Lithuania experienced three ultimatums and two occupations and lost its independence without a fight, Lithuanian society experienced a severe moral and psychological crisis that erased for some not only their confidence in the state but also their human values. In this climate, part of the society began to believe that Jews were an implacable enemy and developed a perverted understanding of patriotism. According to one executioner, "It was terrible to shoot, but I thought it was necessary for Lithuania's independence". Moreover, the invaders ordered and encouraged such actions.

After the first *Einsatzgruppen* actions in early August 1941, 95% of Lithuanian Jews were still alive. However, in July 1941, Reich Commissioner Heinrich Himmler travelled throughout the occupied western part of the USSR and conveyed a message to the *Einsatzgruppen* (the "A" unit that operated in Kaunas and the "B" unit in Vilnius) that not only Jewish men, but also women and children had to be killed. A mechanism was designed to carry out the massacre. On 16 August, Lithuanian Police Department Director Vytautas Reivytis used the secret Circular No. 3 to order the detention of all Jews and their concentration in designated locations. All provincial Jews were driven into temporary ghettos and isolation camps. Over the next few months, the Nazis undertook the horrific destruction of Lithuanian Jewish communities in the provinces. Whole Jewish communi-

Massacre of Jews in *Lietūkis* Garage in Kaunas on 27 June 1941. Photo reproduction by Romas Mičiūnas.

ties were shot dead in forests, fields and gravel pits a few kilometres away from their ghettos and detention camps, and their bodies were dumped into ditches that had been dug for that purpose. Preparation for the mass murders and the transport and shooting of victims involved Lithuanian self-defence police units in Zarasai, Kupiškis, Jonava and other locations, as well as the auxiliary police and some local station policemen who had sworn allegiance to Adolf Hitler. Shootings were carried out mainly by the two special *Sonderkommando* units formed of Lithuanians – the Special SD Squad in Vilnius (in Paneriai) and Hamann's "Flying Detachment" (*Rollkommando Hamann*), which went to provincial areas a few times a week and perpetrated the shootings. The latter unit was basically formed of members of the 3rd Company of the Kaunas NLP Battalion. Each *Sonderkommando* unit consisted of some 50–100 members. Some massacres were carried out by Lithuanian auxiliary police and police volunteers, with some criminals among them, who participated in order to loot and steal Jewish property, including houses, household goods, jewellery, bedding and clothes. The Nazis also used the Russian army units of Nazi collaborator Andrey Vlasov in actions against the Jews in Lithuania, as well as Ukrainian and Latvian police battalions.

Day after day throughout the summer and autumn of 1941, most Lithuanian Jews (about 150,000) were killed in massacres. About 50,000 Jews were temporarily left in the Vilnius, Kaunas, Šiauliai and smaller ghettos

and used as forced labour. Jews in the large ghettos, however, were also regularly decimated during the so-called "actions". In 1943, as the war approached its end, the Nazis began eliminating the city ghettos, and dug up and burned dead bodies. Some 11,000 Lithuanian Jews were deported to concentration camps in Estonia and Latvia, about 3,500 to camps in Poland and about 8,000 to Stutthof, Dachau and Auschwitz. During the Holocaust, about 90% of the approximately 208,000 Lithuanian Jews were killed (including those in the Vilnius region). About 8,000 were rescued and survived and a further 8,000–9,000 escaped death because they managed to retreat to the depths of the USSR. About 6,000–8,000 Jews brought from Austria, Germany, Czechoslovakia and France were shot dead in Fort IX in Kaunas. Parts of the Lithuanian police self-defence battalions were involved in actions against civilians in Belarus, Poland and Ukraine.

Resistance groups emerged in the ghettos, while some Jews fled into the forests and joined the anti-Nazi resistance. These were Soviet partisan units, in which the Jews took up arms despite encountering anti-Semitic attitudes. Many Lithuanian Jews fought in the 16th Lithuanian Riflemen's Division formed in the Soviet Union.

By the autumn of 1941, Lithuanian city and town centres were emptied and former Jewish homes were appropriated by new institutional or individual owners, while the Nazis looted all the most valuable Jewish cultural objects. The massacre of the Jews caused widespread indignation. Nazi collaborators lost their reputation in society, faced denunciation and accusations in churches and were denigrated as *žydšaudžiai* (Jew shooters) among ordinary people. Other Lithuanians risked their lives and those of their families trying to help and save Jews, and some were shot for hiding them. Many Jews were saved by Catholic priests, nuns and ordinary peasants. Some 830 Lithuanians have been recognized as "Righteous among the Nations" for rescuing Jews, although there were actually many more and the list is growing as facts come to light.

As a result of the Nazi policy of racial genocide, Lithuania lost a rich and colourful part of its heritage – the Jews, who had lived in the country for centuries. The massacre of innocent people just because they were Jews is the bloodiest page in Lithuania's 20th-century history. The loss of so much human potential and talent was an enormous tragedy not only for the Jewish people but also the whole of Lithuania.

Lithuania under Nazi Occupation

The Nazis regarded the USSR and its occupied countries as backward nations which should submit to German domination. According to their ideology, the German nation's racial and cultural superiority made it the "master race", while "racially inferior elements" needed to be eliminated. In Nazi Germany's plans, the Baltic countries were regarded as the Germans' "defensive space" and were gradually to be assimilated into the Third Reich. Even before attacking the USSR, Germany's leaders had decided to annihilate the Jews, Roma, persons with terminal or mental illnesses, Soviet officials and communists in the lands they conquered. Part of the remaining population was to be Germanized, while others would become cheap labour. Exiled peoples were to be replaced with millions of displaced Germans.

Germany treated Lithuania as a constituent part of the Soviet Union and at first it was under military rule. Civilian control was introduced at the end of July 1941. The resolution of 17 July established the Reich Commissariat for Eastland (*Reichskommissariat Ostland*) made up of "the formerly free states of Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia" and Belarus. It was subdivided into the general regions (*Generalbezirk*) of Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia and Belarus. Each region was headed by a general commissioner (*Generalkommissar*) who, alongside key civil authorities, was responsible for policing and providing an adequate supply of labour for the German army and the military economy. The German administration in Lithuania subordinated the country's resources and economy to meet the needs of Germany, irrespective of the needs of the local population. The requisitioning of agricultural products was a hardship for Lithuanian farmers, yet severe penalties were imposed if they failed to comply. German colonists were settled in Lithuania (about 30,000 people, mostly Germans who had lived there before the war). The occupation authorities systematically destroyed or looted the country's cultural treasures and imposed controls on educational and cultural institutions, using them to Germanize, propagandize and disseminate Nazi ideology. After Lithuania's resources were mobilized for the war effort against the USSR, the country's residents were conscripted and sent to Germany for forced labour, especially after the defeat at the Battle of Stalingrad, when the war industry experienced shortages of workers. About 60,000 Lithuanians were sent to Germany for forced labour.

Lithuanian-Americans collected donations for the American war effort and purchased an aeroplane for the US Army. It was named *Lituanica* to honour the Lithuanian pilots Steponas Darius and Stasys Girėnas (inset). The aeroplane is being blessed by Fr P. Lubys, 1943 (a postcard from that time).

The Nazis consolidated their rule through repression, terror, and the murder of politically suspect and insubordinate people, including farmers who were unable to fulfill their requisition quotas. Anybody suspected of attempts on the lives of German soldiers was executed without trial and sometimes entire villages were burnt down in reprisals, such as the massacre at the village of Pirčiupiai. In 1941–1944, the Germans killed not only Jews, but also about 15,000 Lithuanians, up to 20,000 people from other ethnic groups and about 170,000 Red Army prisoners of war. These people were executed by the special operational units of the aforementioned German security police and security service. The policy of terror in Lithuania was also carried out by SS military units, the self-defence police battalions and local police. The lack of German civilian manpower to establish an occupation administration meant the Nazi regime allowed governmental institutions to continue functioning. Mid-level and lower-level positions continued to be held by Lithuanians who had been appointed by the Provisional Government, but the German regime appointed general advisers to replace the Provisional Government's ministers, and the ministries themselves were renamed departments. The Lithuanian government, in short, was administered by Lithuanian advisers who were subordinate to a gen-

eral adviser – the Nationalist Party supporter General Petras Kubiliūnas. Four advisers who refused to carry out German policies were arrested in 1943 and transported to the Stutthof concentration camp.

The German-subordinated Lithuanian governmental system consisted of approximately 300 county supervisors and district chiefs, about 900 security and criminal police officers, about 8,000 Lithuanians who served in the police self-defence battalions and about 6,000 who served in the police force responsible for maintaining public order. In addition, there were hundreds of village elders, honorary police officers, tax collectors, inspectors and other officials who served the Germans willingly or unwillingly and helped them exploit the country. For this and other reasons, the Lithuanian underground press described the Lithuanian institutions permitted to function by the Nazi regime, ostensibly "self-government" (*savivalda*), as "self-strangulation" (*savismauga*). Often Lithuanian officials failed to carry out German orders, undermined them and helped rescue Jews. Germany did not allow the establishment of Lithuanian political parties or organizations and persecuted those who were ill-disposed to the occupation authorities, with strict press censorship in place.

Lithuania's anti-Nazi resistance movement did not turn into armed opposition because this would have resulted in mass reprisals against the civilian Lithuanian population, a threat which was openly made by the Nazis to discourage Lithuanians from armed revolt. When it became apparent that Germany was losing the war, the resistance decided not to waste its forces and resources fighting the losing side. The underground movement engaged in tactics of unarmed resistance: they disseminated anti-Nazi materials, encouraged the population to evade military service in German-organized units, to evade impressment into forced labour in Germany, and to avoid fulfilling agricultural requisitions. They also encouraged Lithuanians to preserve cultural and educational institutions and expose collaborators. Politicians of the Christian Democratic wing and members of the Catholic youth movement *Ateitininkai* (Futurists) coalesced around the Lithuanian Front (LF, reorganized from the LAF during the German occupation) and the Lithuanian Unity Movement (*Lietuvių vienybės sąjūdis*), while liberal-minded nationalists (National Unionists) formed the Union of Lithuanian Freedom Fighters (ULFF). Both movements issued underground publications. In 1943–1944, the Supreme Committee for the Liberation of Lithuania (SCLL) also operated underground, comprising various Lithuanian

political forces. This organization was intended to unite the resistance and operate as a quasi-government until the restoration of the country's independence, defending the claims of Lithuanian sovereignty inside the country and abroad. Junior officers banded together in a secret military organization called the Lithuanian Freedom Army (LFA), founded on the initiative of Reserve Lieutenant Kazys Veverskis in Vilnius in 1941. It was the largest anti-Nazi organization and hoped to liberate at least part of Lithuania, declare the territory independent, and defend it with arms.

In 1943, as the German army continued to suffer losses on the eastern front, the German occupation regime demanded that men in the occupied nations, including Lithuania, form SS divisions to be sent to the front. The Lithuanian underground movement urged the population to boycott the campaign, and thus Lithuania was one of only a few occupied countries in which the Nazis failed to mobilize local inhabitants for the *Waffen* SS. In reprisal for the boycott, the Gestapo arrested 46 prominent Lithuanian public figures in mid-March 1943 and sent them to the Stutthof concentration camp. They also closed Kaunas and Vilnius universities, teachers' colleges and other institutions, and arrested many underground press publishers and their colleagues, as well as members of the ULFF and LFA. In May and June, they arrested six of the nine members of the SCLL leadership. Most of those taken into custody were sent to Nazi concentration camps.

As they lost battles on the eastern front, the occupation authorities adopted a more conciliatory position vis-à-vis the Lithuanians, allowing them to convene the so-called Lithuanian Conference in Kaunas on 5 April 1943. By doing so, the Nazis sought to secure the support of Lithuanian society for their mobilization efforts and give them a semblance of legitimacy, while the Lithuanian figures involved hoped to preserve the nation, avoid repression and gain political concessions. Although the conference participants sharply criticized the occupation authorities, the decisions they adopted reflected their own pro-German orientation as well as that of a part of Lithuanian society. Implementing their decisions required collaboration with the Nazis. However, the Nazis were again unsuccessful in mobilizing Lithuania's young men.

On 23–24 November 1943, a meeting of general advisers and the so-called National Council that was elected at the Lithuanian Conference rejected plans for forming an SS unit in favour of a national Lithuanian army. Early the following year, forced by failures at the front, the German authori-

ties approved the Lithuanians' proposal to organize a military force – the Lithuanian Territorial Defence Force (*Lietuvos vietinė rinktinė*) was to be commanded by Lithuanian officers and could operate only on Lithuanian territory. General Povilas Plechavičius became its chief commander. Some 20,000 volunteers responded to his call to enlist and 10,000 of them were accepted. The Germans demanded that this Lithuanian force should be subordinate to them. The Lithuanian soldiers had no intention of fighting on the German side and began to disperse, taking their arms and ammunition with them. The Nazis arrested the leaders of the Lithuanian Territorial Defence Force, shot eighty soldiers and sent others to Germany for forced labour.

Lithuanian-Polish relations developed inimically in the Vilnius region, which was made part of the general region of Lithuania by the Nazis, and was therefore under Lithuanian jurisdiction. In implementing Nazi-dictated policy, the Lithuanian administration ignored the interests of the Polish majority and earned their hatred. To combat the Polish resistance, the civil administration dispatched units of the Lithuanian Territorial Defence Force to the Vilnius region, where they encountered armed units of the Polish *Armia Krajowa* (Home Army). Lithuanians considered the Vilnius region to be part of Lithuania, while the Poles regarded it as part of Poland. The combatants on both sides poured out their wrath on local Lithuanian or Polish villagers and committed atrocities. Communication between the Polish and Lithuanian underground movements was thus lost. The Lithuanians continued their tactics of passive resistance toward the Nazis and considered the USSR to be their main enemy, while for the Poles the main enemy was Germany.

Passive resistance helped the Lithuanians to avoid even greater repression and casualties. The resistance was mobilizing for the greater struggle they knew was coming: the Moscow-based leadership of the Lithuanian SSR was already announcing on Moscow Radio that they were ready to return and restore the Soviet system.

BACK TO THE USSR

As the Red Army broke through the German lines and forced the Nazis to retreat from the occupied territories in 1944–1945, almost the whole of Eastern and Central Europe fell into Soviet hands by May 1945. Power in the territories occupied by the

Red Army was soon in the hands of local communist parties which were entirely dependent on the Soviet Union. The communist regimes installed in Eastern and Central Europe within a few years survived for nearly half a century.

From the Nazi Occupation to the Soviet Occupation

In the summer of 1944, Soviet military forces routed the Nazis and re-occupied Lithuania. The totalitarian Stalinist regime was restored, requisitions began and men were rounded up for forced labour. The Communist Party, bolstered by the state security apparatus (the NKGB and the NKVD), Soviet officials and the Red Army, took control of the government and the country. By spring 1945, six thousand Russian-speakers were sent to Lithuania to take up key posts.

At the Tehran Conference toward the end of 1943, Franklin D. Roosevelt and Winston Churchill essentially conceded Eastern Europe to post-war Soviet domination, but Roosevelt did secure Stalin's assurance that reincorporation of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania into the Soviet Union would take place only after a vote on the question by the people of those countries. In restoring Soviet rule in Lithuania, Joseph Stalin "kept" his promise by staging farcical undemocratic elections to the governing bodies of the USSR, namely, the Supreme Council, or Soviet, of the USSR and the Supreme Council of the Lithuanian SSR. Elections to these institutions took place for the first time after the war in 1946 and 1947. Elections also took place to local councils, or soviets. In all elections, only the Communist Party could field candidates and there was only one candidate for each office. The results were a foregone conclusion: a turnout of more than 90% of voters was officially reported, with an absolute majority said to have voted for the nominees. The LSSR's institutions had no real power. Even the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Lithuania (Bolsheviks) only had the status of a party committee of an ordinary Russian province. For three decades, the CPL was headed by Central Committee First Secretary Antanas Sniečkus. His activities, however, were carefully monitored by a Moscow-appointed non-Lithuanian Second Secretary of the Central Committee. The CPL had 3,500 members in 1945, 22,200 in 1948 and 36,200 in 1953. Lithuanians, however, only comprised 18% of the party members.

A World War II scene in Vilnius, July 1944.

For the first time in the nation's history, Klaipėda and Vilnius were both constituent parts of Lithuania, although Lithuania itself was no longer free. By thus making the country whole, the Soviets expected to "buy" Lithuanian goodwill for the regime. The Soviet-ruled territory of the Lithuanian SSR now encompassed 65,000 square kilometres and Vilnius was designated the republic's capital. As a result of losses suffered in the war, the population's ethnic composition changed dramatically. The Nazis and their collaborators killed about 70,000 Vilnius residents, most of them Jews, while 12,000 people were taken to Germany for forced labour, most of whom never returned. About 30,000 residents left Vilnius during the war for various other reasons. In 1945–1948, the USSR repatriated 107,600 Poles from Vilnius and about 197,200 from other areas of Lithuania to Poland. Around half of the post-war increase in the population of Vilnius was attributable to migrants from other Soviet republics, mostly from Russia and Belarus. The number of Lithuanians among the new residents grew in the ensuing years. The population of Vilnius was about 179,000 at the end of 1951, including 55,000 Lithuanians (30%). In January 1989, Vilnius had a population of about 580,000, including 291,000 Lithuanians (50%). [By 2012, Lithuanians accounted for 63% of the city's population.] The mass forced emigration of local Germans meant that Klaipėda became

Lithuanians being deported to Siberia in cattle wagons.

Exiled Lithuanians logging in Siberia, Irkutsk, 1952.

more Lithuanian in a similar manner. Lithuanian cities generally grew and saw sizeable increases in their population during the Soviet period. Urban residents comprised 23.7% of the country's population before World War II, while the corresponding indicator was 68% in 1989. New towns emerged as a result of Soviet industrialization policies, including Naujoji Akmenė (pop. 13,000), Elektrėnai (16,000) and Visaginas (32,000).

When the Soviets began to mobilize Lithuanians to serve in the Soviet military during the war, they were surprised that Lithuanians tried to escape service in the Red Army. Lithuanians held that their country was occupied, and therefore the USSR was in violation of the Hague Convention of 1907 by conscripting them. Nonetheless, the internal and border troops of the USSR's NKVD, mainly through raids and terror, managed to mobilize 108,000 Lithuanian men into the Soviet military during 1944–45 to fight against Germany (and later Japan). Thousands of Lithuanians hid or deserted from the Soviet military. Thousands joined the ranks of the Lithuanian partisans who fought against the Soviets. The conscripted Lithuanians reinforced the 16th Lithuanian Rifle Division of the Red Army. They were hastily and therefore poorly trained, and then thrown into battles in Belarus, Lithuania (Šiauliai and Klaipėda), and the Courland Pocket,

where thousands of them were killed. NKVD divisions stationed in Lithuania carried out punitive operations. In July– December 1944 alone, 2,489 people were killed and about 100,000 Lithuanians suffered some sort of violence or coercion from the invaders. Mass deportations to Siberia were initiated to suppress the armed resistance, with 40,002 people deported in May 1948, 33,500 in 1949 and 20,357 in 1951. After these mass deportations, the rural population was demoralized and resistance broke down. Resigning themselves to Soviet domination, people submitted to collectivization and joined the newly established collective farms en masse. Some 456,000 people (every third adult Lithuanian, or every other male) were victimized by the Soviet genocide and terror. A total of 332,000 people were imprisoned, exiled or deported to Gulag camps and another 26,500 were killed in Lithuania. Lithuania lost a total of 1.1 million people, or more than a third of its population.

The situation started to change after the death of Stalin in 1953, especially after Nikita Khrushchev denounced Stalin's cult of personality in 1956. The Russification process was soft-pedalled and the regime began to rely more on local Lithuanians. Prisoners and exiles began to be released throughout the USSR. Although the Lithuanian Communist Party did not want exiles returning to their home country, fearful that they would strengthen nationalist sentiments among the Lithuanian people and make it more difficult for the party to inculcate the spirit of "friendship among peoples", about 60,000 exiles and 20,000 political prisoners returned in the 1950s and 1960s. Some of them were prohibited from settling in Lithuania, holding managerial positions or teaching in higher education institutions. They were officially ignored, closely observed and often accused of "anti-Soviet activity" and "bourgeois nationalism."

As mass physical terror was abandoned during the post-Stalin period, violations of human rights and freedoms became more discreet and limited. However, the forced ideological brainwashing and application of administrative methods to control people continued. A firm monopoly on power was held by the Communist Party of Lithuania, which gradually became more and more Lithuanian. There were 13,000 Lithuanians in the CPL (37% of party members) in 1953 and 55,000 (63%) in 1965. The totalitarian nature of the Soviet system remained, with everyone having to profess the official ideology. People were spied upon, dissent and resistance were suppressed, and the administrative apparatus was subservi-

ent to Moscow. The regime became more repressive again under Leonid Brezhnev, when Stalinist hard-liners strengthened their positions in ruling circles. The persecution of dissidents started again, with 1,583 people sentenced for anti-Soviet agitation and propaganda in Lithuania from 1967 to 1975. The economy and public life were militarized and communist ideology was more insistently propagated, although the regime did not resort to outright terror.

The Soviet regime in post-war Lithuania inflicted significant losses on the country's population. During the Stalinist period, the occupation authorities not only killed thousands of people, but also destroyed entire social classes, their culture and property. People who remained in Lithuania lived in fear for their own and their relatives' safety and were forced to adapt, collaborate or resist. During the de-Stalinization period, conformity and adaptation became the norm, but before that there was a bloody and drawn-out fight for freedom.

The War after the War – Armed Resistance

From the summer of 1944, Soviet repressions and terror fuelled the resistance of the Lithuanian nation, and a decade-long guerrilla war for the restoration of Lithuania's independence broke out. Among the three Baltic States, resistance was strongest in Lithuania. People in Lithuania still naively believed in the West. They believed that Communist rule would be short-lived, that the USA and Great Britain would eventually fulfil the commitments of the Atlantic Charter and return independence to those countries that lost it during the war, and that the West would rise to fight against Stalin's USSR. They prepared for that by taking up arms, so that when the time came they could take power into their own hands. Partisan combat squads began to form at the end of summer 1944, and quickly grew into partisan units, districts and regions. Partisans wore Lithuanian military uniforms, although most were young men – children of farmers, small landowners and landless peasants – who had never served in the armed forces. After joining the ranks of the partisans, these men had to learn the stratagems of warfare and adapt to harsh living conditions in forests and bunkers. Military training was provided in the combat units.

While anti-Nazi resistance was concentrated in cities and was unarmed, anti-Soviet resistance was armed and took place in rural areas, where par-

A group of Lithuanian partisans, 1947.

tisans could receive support from farmers in the form of food, medicines and clothing. Initially help from abroad was expected, but hopes dimmed quickly. The partisans fought alone. In 1944–1946, large partisan units formed that consisted of up to 100 fighters each and jointly totalled over 30,000 men (a Soviet report of 1953 puts the number at 38,106). They controlled the whole of Lithuania except for cities and towns. They stayed in villages, posted guards and went into battle when NKVD units appeared. When they occupied small towns, they killed the local garrisons and destroyed rural district documents, mobilization lists and grain requisition sheets. They also released detainees, executed zealous henchmen of the occupation authorities and warned others not to serve the enemy. Partisans tried to disrupt local elections carried out under the auspices of the occupation authorities by opening fire on voting stations. They tried to stop logging operations in the forests and fought against forced collectivization. Partisan court martials tried and executed those who implemented the deportations, Soviet officials, spies and traitors.

When the Soviets cut Lithuania off from access to information from the free world and took away people's radio receivers, the partisans established press and information departments in all of their districts. During the

General Jonas Žemaitis–Vytautas.

whole period of guerrilla resistance, about 80 periodicals were published for a longer or shorter time. These periodicals served as a public source of information about partisans' attitudes towards collaborators and of world political news. Partisans prepared and published collections of poetry, satire, prose pieces and partisan prayer books. The press was distributed mostly by young people – 640 people were arrested for distribution in 1947 alone.

During the second stage of warfare (from June 1946 to November 1948), after having lost about 10,000 men in battle (mostly to the Soviet interior forces), the partisans reorganized into smaller fighting units, and dug underground bunkers in or near homesteads to hide from the enemy during massive man-hunt operations. These mobile squads were no longer a place for romantic or casual fighters, but only for those who were determined to fight to the death. Heavy casualties and persecutions disrupted communications between partisan units and districts, and unit control weakened. Thus the partisans switched to usual guerrilla war tactics: setting up ambushes and killing Soviet officials and collaborators. To fight the partisans, the occupation authorities increasingly began recruiting secret agents (*smogikai*), captured partisans who agreed under torture to collaborate and infiltrate partisan units, and teamed them up with regular officers of the Soviet interior forces (MGB).

At the end of 1947, partisans Juozas Lukša (code name Daumantas or Skirmantas) and Kazimieras Pyplys (code name Mažytis) smuggled documents written by the partisans through the Iron Curtain to the free world. These documents included lists compiled by the partisan districts of people exiled, killed and arrested by the occupation authorities; a letter from the partisan leadership to Pope Pius XII; and other relevant materials. The hope was that the world would start paying attention to the occupation of Lithuania and that international organizations would demand that the Soviet Union end its terror there. This was the first time that communica-

tion was established between partisans and Lithuanians who had fled to the West and their organizations. The West received first-hand information about the situation in Soviet-occupied Lithuania and about the partisan war. However, the West (more accurately, the British, American and Swedish intelligence services) made no serious efforts to support the armed struggle of the anti-Soviet resistance movement. Several attempts were made to infiltrate small groups of resistance fighters from the West, primarily to spy on the USSR, but they were compromised by double agents, primarily in the British secret services.

During the third phase of the resistance, from November 1948 to May 1953, centralized organizational structures were formed but soon destroyed. After many unsuccessful attempts, the first and last congress of all Lithuanian partisan commanders took place in a bunker at the Mikniai family homestead in Minaičiai village (between Radviliškis and Baisogala) on 2–22 February 1949. The congress approved the organization's new name – *Lietuvos laisvės kovos sąjūdis* (LLKS) or Lithuanian Movement for the Fight for Freedom (LMFF) – and partisans started being called "freedom fighters" (occupation Soviet authorities usually called the Lithuanian partisans "bandits"). The LMFF undertook to direct both the political and military activities of the resistance organizations. The congress analysed the most important documents regulating partisan activities, devised a common fighting strategy and tactical plans, and formed a supreme partisan command. Jonas Žemaitis (code name Vytautas) was elected Chairman of the Presidium of the LMFF Council and awarded the highest rank of Partisan General. (Žemaitis was a professional military officer who graduated from Kaunas Military School in 1929, attained the rank of lieutenant, served in the 2nd Artillery Regiment, and studied at the French School of Applied Artillery from 1936–1938.) The 16 February 1949 Declaration of the LMFF was adopted in the bunker. It envisaged the restoration of the Lithuanian state and stated its governing principles: it

Desecrated bodies of Dainava district partisans.

would be a democratic republic; sovereignty would belong to the nation; Lithuania would be governed by a Seimas elected by secret ballot in free and democratic elections with universal suffrage; the elected Seimas would form the Government (Cabinet). The Presidium of the LMFF Council became the highest authority in the land until free and democratic Seimas elections could be held.

A large contingent of NKVD troops was stationed in Lithuania to fight the partisans. In the summer of 1945, there were up to 20,000 troops, and in 1946, about 14,000. NKVD and NKGB departments were set up in all districts. They coordinated and led punitive operations, tracked down suspects, interrogated detainees and recruited agents. The Soviet authorities also established "destruction battalions" (Rus. *istrebitelnye batalyony*) to fight against Lithuanian partisans alongside the NKVD troops. In Lithuania, these battalions began to be formed by order of the First Secretary of the Lithuanian Communist Party Antanas Sniečkus on 24 July 1944. Party committees and the NKVD formed these battalions (about 150 individuals per battalion) throughout Lithuania. The Lithuanians called the members of these battalions *stribai* (from the Russian word *istrebiteli*, i.e., "destroyers"). The Soviet authorities agitated locals, especially Communist Party and Communist Youth members, to join them. Between 1944–1954, more than 20,000 people (including 16,000 Lithuanians) became members of such units because doing so excused them from serving in the Red Army, while they also received wages and clothing for their service. Several hundred of them deserted with their arms to join the partisans. Many of the *stribai* were persons of dubious morals who commanded no respect among the people. The Soviet authorities soon realized that the term "destroyers" won them no sympathies with the people and the name of these groups was changed to *liaudies gynėjai* ("defenders of the people"). They were deployed in all rural districts and one of their tasks was to protect Soviet activists. They also fought the partisans (although very poorly), searched for Red Army deserters and those avoiding conscription, and acted as scouts, translators and spies for the mostly Russian and Russian-speaking Soviet troops. They were also infamous for desecrating the bodies of fallen partisans by simply dropping them in the town and village squares of Lithuania. They did not allow proper burial of the bodies but subsequently buried them surreptitiously in swamps and garbage dumps. This served the dual purpose of demonstrating the consequences

of resistance and possibly identifying relatives or sympathizers by their reaction to seeing the bodies.

In other efforts to end support for the partisan movement in rural areas, Soviet repressive organs exiled the families and supporters of the freedom fighters to Siberia and tortured members of the resistance, including women, old people and children, and used all other possible means of psychological and physical coercion. MGB and NKGB killing squads (Lith. *smogikai*) sometimes dressed in the uniforms and used the insignia of the resistance movement to terrorize people and turn them against the partisans. They shot partisan couriers and supporters.

After suffering a stroke in December of 1951, General Jonas Žemaitis–Vytautas was being treated in an underground bunker. In the spring of 1953, captured partisans recruited as double agents betrayed his location and he was captured. He was taken to Butyrka prison in Moscow for interrogation. On 25 June 1954, he was interrogated by Marshal of the Soviet Union Lavrentiy Beria, who had been in command of NKVD units responsible for anti-partisan operations on the Eastern Front during World War II. We do not know what they talked about, but the fact that Žemaitis was visited by Beria himself shows that Beria recognized that the ongoing guerrilla war in Lithuania was a serious threat to Soviet control. Žemaitis was sentenced to death and shot on 26 November 1954. In 1956, one of the last partisan commanders, the former teacher Adolfas Ramanauskas (code name Vanagas) was captured, and after a year of being brutally tortured was executed. Although the organized armed struggle ended in the spring of 1953, several individual partisans were able to hide out for another ten years and more.

Partisan leader Adolfas Ramanauskas–Vanagas (the Hawk) with his faithful hawks perched on his shoulders.

Although the heroic guerrilla war which the partisans waged without any external support was

lost, its significance is great. The extent of this war can be gauged in part from Soviet operational data, although it should be kept in mind that Soviet statistics are unreliable for various reasons. According to a Ministry of Internal Affairs (MVD) report of 1953: in 1944–1953, MVD troops killed 20,093 and arrested 17,963 partisans; amnestied and legalized 38,604 people; captured 9 cannons, 31 anti-tank guns, 32 mortars, 3,014 heavy and light machine guns, 39,433 submachine guns, rifles and pistols, and 557 typewriters and copying machines. By their courage, sacrifice and lives, the freedom fighters proved that in the summer of 1940 Lithuania was annexed to the Soviet Union against the will of the people, and redeemed the Lithuanian government and military's failure to act when invaded. According to Ministry for State Security (MGB) data: in 1944–1953, the number of partisans killed was 20,103; the number of Soviet soldiers and functionaries killed by the partisans was 12,921; and the number of Communist Party and other pro-Soviet activists and collective farmers killed by the partisans was 2,619. As in any other war, significant civilian casualties could not be avoided. Many such casualties occurred in areas where Soviet troops and the *stribai* operated, but partisans were responsible for some of the civilian casualties as well. Among the partisans there were some who abused alcohol or were complicit in the massacre of Jews during the Nazi occupation, but certainly there were not many such persons. It was impossible, however, for partisan unit and district commanders to check the credentials of all their fighters. Living for a long time in underground bunkers also had a negative psychological impact.

Sovietization of the Economy

Unifying economic conditions throughout the Soviet republics, the Soviets nationalized private property in all sectors of the economy. In the agricultural sector, collective farms were established. However, the collectivization process in Lithuania was delayed by the guerrilla war. According to the new order, land left in abeyance and the land of those who escaped to the West or were repatriated to Poland was added to the state land reserve. Land belonging to the partisans and exiles was also transferred to the land reserve. In the spring of 1948, collectivization in rural Lithuania was met by strong opposition. Repressive measures were first taken against well-to-do farmers, called kulaks, who were allowed to keep

"Red line of carts." The forcible delivery of agricultural products from collective farms to the state. Vilnius, 1947. Photograph by L. Meinertas.

up to 30 ha of land. Kulaks were also those who hired labour, or owned agricultural equipment such as threshers and tractors, or mills and sawmills, as well as those who rented stock or lent grain and tools to other peasants. Kulaks faced increased taxes and grain requisitions, which were 50–100% higher than those for the so-called "working peasants". Many kulak families were exiled during the deportations of 1949 and 1951, others moved to the cities or other republics in the USSR. As the regime deliberately raised land taxes and grain requisition norms for peasants, more than half of Lithuania's peasants were indebted to the state for milk and meat in 1949. Such farms were written up and their owners convicted. Kulaks could in fact be deprived of everything, except for their dwelling house.

These policies had the desired effect. Only 4% of peasants were members of collective farms at the start of 1949, but the number increased to 62% by the end of the year. By 1952, as much as 94% of all the country's land was collectivized. Without permission of the collective farm management, a collective farmer could not move to another location. Since the land was expropriated by the state, a collective farmer was paid a meagre salary for days worked. He could supplement his income by also working the 0.6 ha plot that was allowed for personal use. The productivity on collective farms was so low that his private plot provided him with about three-quarters of

his income. Over time, the situation in the collective farms changed slowly for the better.

Collectivization sharply undermined the Lithuanian agricultural sector. It took twenty years for the LSSR to reach the levels of pre-war independent Lithuania in grain yields, livestock population and productivity. Forcibly driven into collective farms, peasants were not inclined to work hard. Earning low wages, they disregarded the threat of heavy punishments and began to steal from the collective farms, which they did not consider a crime. They no longer valued work. The former ethical standards of religious peasants degenerated, and some began drowning their sorrows in drink. Collectivization also meant the end of small individual farms. During the rest of the Soviet period, the individual dwelling houses of small farms were systematically destroyed and their owners forced to move to collective farm settlements (where neighbours knew everything about each other and they could be controlled by the authorities) or to towns and cities.

Lithuanian industry was integrated into the USSR's industrial complex. The Soviet regime's post-war plans were facilitated by the circumstance that the Soviet nationalization which had taken place in 1940 was not reversed by the Nazis during their years of occupation (1941–1944). Increased taxes forced private firms to close. Machinery, equipment and raw materials to rebuild industry in Lithuania were delivered from the depths of the USSR or occupied East Germany. In turn, many food and wood products were taken out of Lithuania. Within several years, Lithuanian industries were restored and production reached pre-war levels.

After Stalin's death in 1953, the Soviet Union began new reforms, emphasizing the need to "democratize" public life, grant more powers to local administrators, and enhance the "sovereignty" of Soviet republics. Ministries were amalgamated in 1953 by merging several into one, and various committees and directorates were abolished and their functions transferred to ministries. The new order granted more authority to the republics of the Soviet Union. They were allowed to approve the production plans of republic-level enterprises and manage the distribution of their products. In 1957, Regional Economic Councils (*Sovnarkhozy*) were established to make economic decisions, instead of union-wide industry and construction ministries, in an effort to decentralize decision-making. The Regional Economic Councils answered to republican Councils of Minis-

Stalin Avenue (now Gediminas Avenue) in Vilnius, 1954.
Photograph by Judelis Kacenbergas.

ters, thus Lithuanian authorities started to control most of the country's enterprises, which employed 76% of the country's workers. The industrial sector became more specialized. The chemical and electronic industries were created and developed. Special emphasis was placed on the production and processing of agricultural products, and thus the agro-industrial complex and light industry expanded. Seeing how difficult it was to control branches of union-wide enterprises, the Lithuanian government sought and received approval from Moscow to develop local industries that were under its control. This policy proved successful and yielded relatively good results, given the conditions at the time. It was not for nothing that Lithuania became known as "the Soviet Union's farm", because large investments were made in the agricultural and food processing sectors. However, this did not mean that Lithuania became more prosperous. As in the whole of the USSR, shops were half empty, with a shortage of meat, vegetables, butter, and often even bread and other staples. People were placed on long waiting lists for their turn to acquire furniture, dishes and TV sets. In addition, there was a catastrophic shortage of housing, medical supplies and drugs. In fact, everything was in short supply. People joked bitterly about the top-down planned economy: if socialism were introduced in the Sahara Desert, it was said, there would soon be a shortage of sand.

Gathering at the Kaunas Hydroelectric Power Plant on the occasion of the commissioning of the first turbine. Kaunas, 16 July 1959. Photograph by Marius Baranauskas.

In the 1960s, the LSSR government drew up a regional economic development plan for the country, the essence of which was to slow the expansion of the old industrial centres of Vilnius, Kaunas, Klaipėda, Šiauliai and Panevėžys, and to construct new enterprises in smaller towns. An absolute majority of the employees of the new enterprises in these towns were Lithuanians from rural areas, since Russian-speaking migrants from the USSR did not want to settle in Lithuanian provincial towns. By developing industry in a decentralized manner, better use was made of the local labour supply. For example, 50–70% of factory workers in Alytus, Plungė and Utena were from the local city or region, while newcomers from the USSR made up just 3–5%. A psychological barrier kept Russians from moving to these new Lithuanian industrial towns. It was one thing to move to Riga, Tallinn or Vilnius, where "their own" Russian-speaking environment predominated, but quite another to go to unheard-of towns where the older people did not even speak Russian. Although many Russian-speaking people settled in Vilnius, Klaipėda and Sniečkus (now Visaginas) in Soviet times, the population of industrialized areas of Lithuania, where agro-industries predominated, was 80% Lithuanian in 1990.

Many new large industrial enterprises were built in the 1960's and 1970's, including the Kaunas Hydroelectric Power Plant, the Mažeikiai Oil Refin-

The Žirmūnai housing estate in Vilnius, 1972.
Photograph by Jonas Botyrius.

ery, the Jonava Fertilizer Plant and the Ignalina Nuclear Power Plant. Due to industrialization, the number of workers in the country increased rapidly, from 490,000 in 1960 to 850,000 in 1970 and to more than 1 million in 1980. As cities grew (the urban share of the population was about 40% in 1960 and 60% in 1980), workers needed housing and therefore large housing estates were planned. They were built according to standardized designs, mostly using large prefabricated concrete slabs. During 1962–1969, the first such housing estate grew up in the Žirmūnai district of Vilnius. These neighbourhoods of uniform, faceless, energy-inefficient blocks of flats became one of the most prominent signs of Soviet urbanization.

Because relations between the USSR and the West were usually hostile, industry in Lithuania and the other Soviet republics was isolated and totally dependent on other regions of the USSR for raw materials. The large industrial plants that were built were integrated into the Soviet economic system. The products they produced were distributed throughout the enormous country. Although Lithuania produced more meat and dairy products per capita than any other republic of the Soviet Union, the bulk of its production was shipped to other regions of the USSR, mainly Moscow and Leningrad (now Saint Petersburg). Income generated by the industrial plants went into the USSR's general budget.

The Soviet government willingly undertook investment and construction projects in Lithuania partly because the functionaries in Moscow were easily bribed (by suitcases filled with smoked sausages and hams), and also because there were no prolonged construction delays requiring unending funding, construction materials were not all stolen, and new plants were put into operation more or less on time. This satisfied the Moscow *nomenklatura*, who faced major corruption and theft problems in other areas of the USSR. Environmental problems began to emerge as a result of the construction of large industrial plants, especially chemical plants, and population growth in major cities. No money was allocated for environmental protection. Because no waste treatment facilities were built, the pollution of Lithuanian rivers, groundwater and the atmosphere increased significantly. The comparatively good industrial indicators of occupied Lithuania could not compensate for the loss of the country's independence and the degradation of its environment.

Cultural Homogenization

The years of Stalin's reign were a period of the direct destruction of Lithuanian culture. Great efforts were made to eradicate any kind of national identity. All fields of culture were controlled and strictly administered by the Communist Party, every published line was censored. Marxist-Leninist philosophy was imposed on all, and all cultural institutions were forced to conform to communist ideology. While the leading ideologues of communism were glorified, the cultural heritage of independent Lithuania was savaged. Books by such renowned Lithuanian writers as Vincas Kudirka, Maironis, Vincas Krėvė-Mickevičius and other authors were removed from libraries, together with any other publication deemed to be "nationalistic". During 1944–1951, about 600,000 publications were destroyed. During the Stalinist period, it was even forbidden to mention the names of cultural figures who had escaped to the West. Anyone who refused to comply with the regime's demands incurred severe punishment. As many as 1,651 members of the intelligentsia (artists, writers, and scholars) were arrested between 1944 and 1953. Most of them were exiled or imprisoned, some killed. Thus most of the cultural elite learned to behave as demanded and lived a dual life -- one public and the other private.

In the schools, the teaching of Stalin's Constitution and the Russian language became compulsory. Religious teaching was banned, and the number of Lithuanian language lessons was reduced. In universities and schools of higher education, specialists brought in from other republics lectured only in Russian. Students were forced to join the Young Pioneer and Communist Youth organizations. Ideologically unreliable teachers were dismissed from their jobs.

The Soviets destroyed the monuments of independent Lithuania, desecrated the cemeteries of volunteer soldiers who died fighting for Lithuania's independence after World War I, and banned national and religious holidays. In 1950, the Lithuanian national anthem (*Tautiška giesmė*) by Vincas Kudirka was prohibited. Monuments across all Lithuania's cities and towns that bore witness to Lithuania's statehood were replaced with statues of Lenin, Stalin, and the victorious Soviet soldier. Communist slogans were hung everywhere. The cultural situation started to ease only in the second half of the 1950s with the onset of de-Stalinization.

During the "thaw" period under Nikita Khrushchev after Stalin's death, the official attitude toward the national cultural heritage became more lenient. The literary classic Vincas Krėvė-Mickevičius, who escaped to the West at the end of the war, was rehabilitated. His works were published, as were those of Jurgis Baltrušaitis, Balys Sruoga, Maironis, Vincas Mykolaitis-Putinas and other authors. Albums of the paintings of Mikalojus Konstantinas Čiurlionis and folk art were also published. But in the introductions to all such publications, the author's biography and and an analysis of his works were presented through the prism of Marxist ideology, and some of the publications were edited and abridged by censors.

The political thaw and signs of liberalization did not mean that any essential change took place in cultural life. The KGB continued to closely monitor cultural organizations. Strict censorship remained in place. Most foreign or pre-World War II publications in libraries were kept as "special collections" in secure areas with very limited and only supervised access. After the Hungarian Revolution of 1956 and the Poznan workers' uprising in Poland that same year, Lithuanian authorities made it clear that there would be no substantive changes in cultural policy. From the late 1950s, an ideological attack began against the staff of Vilnius University's Department of Lithuanian Literature and some other cultural figures. They were accused of "bourgeois nationalism" and being negatively influenced by Western culture.

During the "thaw", by presenting Lithuanian folk art, crafts and architecture as creations of the common people, i.e, the masses lauded by Marxist ideology, attempts were made to revive genuine cultural traditions by presenting them in a framework of ideological correctness. Thus an open-air ethnographic museum was established in Rumšiškės (near Kaunas), art and ethnographic societies were founded, ethnographic research was legalized, and folklore ensembles formed. Although some attempts were made to preserve church buildings and the valuable art inside them, the emphasis was always on their architectural and artistic value rather than religious function. In the closed cathedral of Vilnius, an art gallery was opened. Other closed churches were adapted in a similar way: the Museum of Atheism was opened in St Casimir's Church, the Museum of Science in St John's Church, the Museum of Folk Art in the Church of All Saints, the Museum of Sculpture and Stained Glass in Kaunas' Garrison Church (St Michael the Archangel's Church), and an exhibit of mostly pre-WWI art from the Čiurlionis Museum in Pažaislis Monastery near Kaunas.

Certain topics and themes of Lithuanian history could now be raised: the Grand Duchy of Lithuania's struggles against the German crusaders, especially the Battle of Grünwald, where the Teutonic knights suffered their final defeat; the pagan past of Lithuania; the heroic but ultimately tragic transatlantic flight of the Lithuanian-American pilots Steponas Darius and Stasys Girėnas; and other similar themes. In general, however, history served the purposes of the Soviet authorities and therefore anything that could be interpreted as anti-Western, anti-German and anti-Catholic was acceptable. Any mention of the GDL's expansion to the East or its campaigns against Moscow was obviously forbidden.

Fearing an upsurge in nationalism after the invasion of Czechoslovakia by the USSR and its allies in 1968, authorities resumed constraints on cultural life in Lithuania. The regime began to reproach artists for the pessimism that allegedly pervaded culture. Editors of some publishing houses and cultural periodicals as well as some cultural officials were replaced. Culture was developed according to the Soviet dictum "national in form, socialist in content". Choirs in traditional national costumes sang songs about Lenin. In the long run, however, and especially at song festivals, such songs became just obligatory socialist dressing on an otherwise national programme dedicated to Lithuanian song and dance. People in other cultural fields also learned how to pay the requisite tribute to communism

while making their contributions, however circumscribed, to the development of national culture.

Various prohibitions were in place right up to the restoration of independence. For example, it was not allowed to mention the independent state of Lithuania unless to criticize and disparage it, nor to mention the post-war mass deportations and the partisan war. Nonetheless, the cultural situation started to improve after the 1960s. Writers, artists and scholars could voice their opinions more openly. In public, they would say and write what was required, but in their inner circles they freely discussed what mattered most to them. Cultural figures gradually became the voices of the nation's conscience. The so-called "Brezhnev era" was favourable to cultural creativity: the better known a person was, the harder it was to initiate a criminal case against him or her, in contrast to the Stalinist era, when the rule "all are equal" applied and the security services could arrest anyone, whether a professor, government minister or common man. Under the new conditions, artists increasingly distanced themselves from socialist realism and tried as much as possible to free their art from politics and propaganda. This was the time when historical novels, plays and films appeared, and a new generation of artists unaffected by the Stalinist repressions emerged. Attempts to bring Lithuanian culture to its knees and cram it into the Procrustean communist bed failed during the Soviet period.

Education and Russification

The rapid urbanization and extensive militarization of the economy greatly increased the demand for skilled labour. The skilled labour was prepared by the totalitarian education system. Teachers were forced to study the works of Lenin, Stalin and Karl Marx, as well as the history of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU), the Constitution of the USSR and materials from the CPSU's congresses. To strengthen the communist indoctrination of youth, Young Pioneer and Komsomol organizations were established in schools, and "Lenin's corners" and wall newspapers provided information and reading texts with the requisite ideological slant.

During 1945–1948, post-war Lithuania experienced the exile of 1,200 teachers in addition to those it lost during the war and became fully integrated into the Soviet Union's educational system. Lithuania was able to

preserve its 11-year secondary education programme because Lithuanian language classes were taught in addition to the standard 10-year secondary education programme introduced in the USSR. In the fall of 1988, when schools with Russian as the teaching language went from a 10-year to an 11-year programme, Lithuanian schools went to a 12-year programme.

As cities grew, a network of crèches and kindergartens, children's homes and boarding schools for children with disabilities developed. In addition, there were vocational technical schools, attended after completing middle school by those preparing to be blue-collar workers. In 1985, nearly 97,000 students studied in 97 such vocational schools. Technicums (specialized semi-professional secondary schools) prepared specialists for the manufacturing, agriculture and construction industries. In 1987, almost 59,000 students studied in 66 technicums.

The content of education was adapted to Soviet ideology and Soviet educational requirements. The most important tasks were to indoctrinate the students with a materialist world view, to prepare "well-educated, active and conscious creators of a communist society", and to promote friendship among the USSR's nationalities. Textbooks were translated from Russian, except those for studying Lithuanian language and literature and the history of Lithuania. Lithuania's real history, however, received little attention; past events were falsified and interpreted according to the principle of class struggle, while the positive role of the USSR and especially of the CPSU was always emphasized. The Russian language received particular emphasis. Participants at the Tashkent conferences of 1975 and 1979 agreed to strengthen the study of Russian in the USSR: to supplement the teaching of Russian at all levels of the educational system by increasing the number of hours that Russian was taught; to raise the qualifications of the staff in Russian language departments at institutions of higher education; to organize language improvement courses for teachers; to equip Russian language laboratories in regions; and to review and improve Russian-language teaching texts. The enhanced programme was aimed not only at improving communication among the country's inhabitants, but also had the effect of promoting Russian cultural expansion. Despite the abilities of the leadership and responsible officials of the Lithuanian SSR to defend the status of Lithuanian in the educational system, between 1987–1989 the resources for teaching Russian in Lithuania were greatly enhanced and expanded.

The role of Lithuanian in public life decreased. It was forced out of the police department, railways, airports and most government offices and enterprises. Russian was held by the Communist Party and government officials to be the language of internationalism. There was an ironic popular saying at the time: "A Russian who loves his country, language and culture is an internationalist; a Lithuanian who loves his culture and language is a nationalist; a Jew who loves his culture and language is a Zionist".

Education in Lithuanian schools of higher education was greatly politicized. The teaching of Marxism-Leninism was mandatory. Schools of higher education in Lithuania were reformed in accordance with the USSR's system of higher education. The government openly interfered in the affairs of higher education, changing the names of the universities at its own discretion. For example, in 1950 Vytautas Magnus University, which by that time had already been renamed the University of Kaunas, was reorganized into the Kaunas Polytechnic Institute and the Kaunas Medical Institute. Vilnius University underwent even more name changes: at first, only "State" was added; then, in 1955, the name of the Lithuanian Bolshevik activist "Vincas Kapsukas" was added; and finally, by 1979, its awards had to appear in its title, so its last Soviet-era name was the "Vilnius Order of the Red Banner of Labour and the Order of Friendship among Nations State Vincas Kapsukas University". The personnel of schools of higher education were vetted and closely watched, lecturers were removed for ideological reasons and others from other parts of the USSR brought in to replace them. The universities and several other newly established schools of higher education were expanded; the number of faculties, specialities and students increased. In 1940–1941, there were 7 schools of higher education with a total of 6,000 students, and by 1987, there were 12 schools of higher education with 65,000 students. It is important to note that Lithuanian was the primary teaching language not only in secondary schools, but also in schools of higher education, even though most of the textbooks were in Russian. Many young people studied at universities and other insititutions of higher education in Moscow, Leningrad and other places in the USSR.

All newspapers in Lithuania began to be duplicated in the Russian language. Many works of Russian literature were published and Russian plays staged. Bilingualism was universally propagated. Officials began to talk about "the formation of the Soviet people", "one Soviet culture", a "fusion"

of nationalities through the Russian language as a "means of international communication", and the "coming together and fusion of Soviet nationalities". All of this talk made it clear that the groundwork for the formation of an ideologically unified and Russian-speaking Soviet nation was being put in place. Lithuanian and other languages would no longer exist in the future. The final product was to be *homo sovieticus*, a person without any national characteristics who would work anywhere when ordered by the Party, as in the lyrics of a well-known song: "My address is neither a house nor a street; my address is the Soviet Union." It began to look like slow but methodical ethnocide.

When a Soviet version of Lithuanian history appeared, it was no longer necessary to pay lip service to the Red Army for its "liberation" of Lithuania from the "bourgeois yoke" in 1940, because a new theory of socialist revolution was constructed. According to the new interpretation, the Lithuanian nation made a voluntary decision to join the Soviet Union. The history of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and the twenty years of Lithuanian independence during the interwar period, however, remained a bone in the throat of the overseers of Soviet historiography. Because education was politicized and controlled directly by the government, because personnel were chosen on ideological grounds and the society isolated from the West, the quality of education in Soviet schools, despite the increase in their number, was inferior to that of interwar Lithuania.

The Lithuanian Diplomatic Service and the Diaspora

Towards the end of World War II, fearing the return of the approaching Red Army and deportations, thousands of Lithuanians fled to the West. According to various data sources, there were more than 72,000 Lithuanian refugees (and more than 111,000 Latvians and about 31,000 Estonians) in Western Europe in 1945. To the number of refugees one should add those tens of thousands of Lithuanians who were taken by the Nazis to Germany as slave labourers and survived the war. After Germany lost the war, they joined other refugees in the Displaced Persons (DP) camps, which were set up in the British, French and American occupation zones. Among the Lithuanian DPs, there were 400 lecturers from Kaunas and Vilnius Universities, half the members of the Writers' Guild and thousands of

Lithuanian refugees picking out donated clothes in a camp in Germany (Scheinfeld), 1948.

school teachers and engineers. The Lithuanian intelligentsia, in short, went either to the West or to Siberia.

When the Cold War broke out between the USA and the USSR, the US Congress passed the Displaced Persons Act of 1948, which envisaged admitting up to 202,000 DPs into the country without regard to quota limitations over the next two fiscal years. Not fewer than 40% of the refugees, the law stipulated, should be from countries "annexed by a foreign power", namely, the Baltic countries. Within three or four years, all the Lithuanian refugees in Germany who were eligible and wished to go to the USA did so, nearly 30,000 of them. Others went to Great Britain, Canada and Australia.

President Antantas Smetona, who left Lithuania in June 1940, was not desired as a permanent resident in any European country. After short stays in Germany and Switzerland, he arrived in the USA via a circuitous route through other countries in 1941. He was allowed into the USA only on the condition that he was there in a private capacity, not as "the head or member of any government", and that he would engage in no political activities. Thus his contacts were limited to the Lithuanian-American community and the Lithuanian diplomatic corps. Smetona died in a fire in his son's home in Cleveland on January 9, 1944.

Issues concerning Lithuanian refugees and Lithuania's freedom were handled in the West by the Lithuanian Diplomatic Service (LDS), a sym-

Stasys Lozoraitis, head of the Lithuanian Diplomatic Service.

bol of Lithuania's statehood which survived throughout the occupation period. The LDS sought to maintain Lithuania's international recognition in countries which did not recognize Lithuania's forcible incorporation into the USSR. Only three countries explicitly did not recognize the incorporation of the Baltic states both *de jure* and *de facto*: the USA, Vatican City, and Ireland. Nearly thirty other countries did not recognize the incorporation *de jure*, but recognized *de facto* control, or had no diplomatic relations with the USSR. Some of these countries changed their positions over time for various reasons. The continued existence of the LDS was significantly enhanced by an order issued by US President Franklin Roosevelt on 15 July 1940, which froze funds of the Baltic States held in US banks. These funds enabled the LDS to maintain some of its legations and personnel until independence was restored.

The chief of the LDS was its highest authority. This post was held by the diplomats Stasys Lozoraitis (1940–1983) and Stasys Antanas Bačkis (1983–1991). Lozoraitis interpreted the post of chief of the diplomatic service as *primus inter pares* ("first among equals"). Although erased from the political world map, thanks to the efforts of the Lithuanian diplomats, Lithuania was not erased from the world's political consciousness. At first, the LDS tried to form a Lithuanian government in exile in the 1940s. However, this attempt became more or less symbolic given the fact that the diplomatic ranks were thinning, and that foreign states adhered to the rule of recognizing only Lithuanian diplomats who had been working in the diplomatic service before the nation's occupation in 1940. With hopes fading that Lithuania's independence would soon be restored with the help of the West, the LDS focused primarily on maintaining its diplomatic legations and personnel. Lithuanian diplomats in their respective countries symbolically represented Lithuania, maintained ties with representatives of the other Baltic countries, and attended receptions and events at the embassies and government institutions of other countries. This helped to establish new ties and maintain existing ones, to maintain legation buildings and to prevent the West from forgetting Lithuania's struggle for independence.

With the restoration of Lithuania's independence, the LDS ceased its activities on 6 September 1991.

The largest part of the Lithuanian diaspora lived in the USA. That was where the most important and strongest émigré organizations were established or located: the Lithuanian American Council (LAC, founded in 1915 and reorganized in 1940), the Lithuanian World Community (LWC, founded in 1949), the Lithuanian-American Community (LAC, founded in 1951), and the Supreme Committee for the Liberation of Lithuania (SCLL; founded in Lithuania in 1943; continued operations in Germany, 1944–1955; moved to New York City, 1955–1990, where it ceased operations when Lithuanian independence was restored). They all tried to present to the world the case of Lithuania's forcible and illegal occupation and incorporation into the Soviet Union, and the aspirations of the Lithuanian people for freedom and independence. The Lithuanian Liberation Work Conference held in White Plains, New York on 26–27 October 1974 was an attempt to bring the various organizations together and clearly define the common goal: "To seek the restoration of an independent Lithuania on the basis of the immutable will of the Lithuanian people". Conference participants planned to provide economic, cultural and political assistance to the people of occupied Lithuania; to transmit to the West factual information about Soviet-occupied Lithuania (mostly from the underground press about religious persecution and the violation of human rights); to inform the West about Lithuania's case for freedom; and to cooperate with organizations and forums which could help influence the governments and parliaments of Western countries, especially the USA.

The Final Act of the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe held in Helsinki, which was signed by the USA, Canada and 33 European states (including the Soviet Union) on 1 August 1975, contributed to Lithuania's case for freedom. The signatory states undertook to respect human rights in their respective territories. High hopes were raised by Article IV on the Territorial Integrity of States: "The participating States will likewise refrain from making each other's territory the object of military occupation or other direct or indirect measures of force in contravention of international law, or the object of acquisition by means of such measures or the threat of them. No such occupation or acquisition [of a territory] will be recognized as legal." By signing the Final Act in front of all of the other states, the USSR reaffirmed the principle of self-determination for all nations.

Lithuanian diaspora organizations always emphasized that the USSR had illegally occupied Lithuania. After the Helsinki Final Act was signed, they made the public even more aware of violations of human rights in Soviet Lithuania and the persecution of dissidents. Contrary to the USSR's wishes, Western countries, particularly the USA, supported the efforts of the Lithuanian diaspora, especially because of the policy of non-recognition. Diaspora organizations, however, did not always present a united front. The SCLL considered itself the main resistance organization and sought a political monopoly in the émigré community. This raised the discontent of diplomatic envoys, especially Stasys Lozoraitis, and friction that lasted many years. Over time, the activities of the LDS and the SCLL became more complementary. This had a very positive effect on raising Lithuania's issues internationally.

The LDS and the Lithuanian diaspora accomplished a great deal in keeping the issue of Lithuanian independence alive in the West during the Cold War. Most importantly, they informed the West about Lithuania's illegal incorporation into the Soviet Union and the violations of human rights in Lithuania and the rest of the Soviet Union. The work of the LDS and the émigré organizations helped the global powers to better understand the situation in the Baltic States. In turn, the main goal of restoring Lithuania's independence encouraged Lithuanian diplomats and diaspora organizations to seek unity in achieving that goal.

An Uncompromising Society

Lithuania was the only Catholic country annexed by the Soviet Union. Although the Soviet regime did not tolerate other religious believers and persecuted them as well, Catholics were particularly problematic because Catholicism was associated with Westernization and the Vatican, over which Moscow had no control. So the Soviets persecuted Catholics with especial brutality. All priests were followed, the names of their visitors were registered, and their sermons recorded. The Soviet regime sought to undermine the authority of the Catholic clergy and to create obstacles for young men wanting to study in theological seminaries. In 1946, the seminaries in Vilnius, Telšiai and Vilkaviškis were closed. Only a single seminary in Kaunas was allowed to operate and the number of seminarians was reduced. There were only 55 seminarians in 1962, even though

churches lacked priests. During the Stalinist era, the occupation authorities tried to destroy the clergy physically, or exile them, and turned churches into warehouses. Under Nikita Khrushchev (during the "thaw" and de-Stalinization), 130 priests were allowed to return from their places of exile, but the Church continued to be defamed and coerced. In 1958, the "thaw" period was drawing to a close, and the battle against religion was renewed in all social spheres, including educational institutions. Atheist study groups were set up in workplaces. Ringing church bells was prohibited. Baptisms and the catechization of children were restricted and discouraged. For their "protection" from religious influences, children under 18 were forbidden to attend church or participate in services as altar boys or choristers or in processions. Parents and priests could be severely punished for violating these regulations. People were discouraged or prevented from attending traditional religious festivals such as those in Žemaičių Kalvarija and Šiluva. The latter is a small town near Raseiniai, which authorities declared off-limits during religious festivals, allegedly due to "swine fever". Believers were also ridiculed and insulted, the erection of crosses (especially the traditional wooden wayside crosses) was banned, and harsh methods were used to stop the construction of a new church in Klaipėda.

During the years of occupation, the symbol of the cross became a powerful source of strength and hope to the Lithuanian people. The Hill of Crosses, 12 km north of the city of Šiauliai in northern Lithuania, on which thousands of crosses were erected by believers, became known not only in Lithuania but also abroad as a symbol of the struggle for religious freedom. It is believed that crosses were first erected on this Hill after the 1831 Uprising. Even after Lithuania was occupied, people continued to visit and leave crosses. It was a way of asserting their identity, cultural heritage and religious beliefs. Although the government forbade placing crosses on the hill, and continually destroyed those that were put up (as many as 2,179 crosses that stood on the hill were destroyed in 1961 alone), almost overnight new crosses would appear. The Hill of Crosses thus acquired a symbolic meaning, and people started to refer to it as the Lithuanian Golgotha. Despite the government ban on religious manifestations, tens of thousands of pilgrims would assemble. They not only prayed and communed amongst themselves, but also acquired rosaries and other prohibited religious items, as well as illegally printed prayer books, catechisms and copies of the Bible. The Hill of Crosses was visited in 1993 by Pope John Paul II, who declared

it a place of hope, peace, love and sacrifice. Over 400,000 crosses stood on the hill in 2006, and it is now a major pilgrimage site known throughout most of the world.

In the 1970s, some priests began to oppose the harsh anti-religious government policies and to demand constitutional rights for believers and the Church. On 19 March 1972, a group of clergy started to publish the underground (*samizdat*) journal, *Chronicle of the Catholic Church in Lithuania*. Its first editor was Father Sigitas Tamkevičius, who worked in Simnas (a small town 23 km west of Alytus) at the time. The publication covered Soviet anti-religious actions and propaganda. The *Chronicle of the Catholic Church in Lithuania* became an important source of information for Western radio stations, such as Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, which provided news, information and analysis to countries behind the Iron Curtain. In its very first issue, the authors published a memorandum from Lithuanian Catholics protesting the persecution of believers. It had been signed by more than 17,000 people. Similar documents were printed in subsequent issues. Separate books of the *Chronicle of the Catholic Church in Lithuania* (5-8 journal numbers per year) reached the West by way of Moscow dissidents. Although published irregularly, it was almost the only *samizdat* journal published in the Soviet Union on a continuous basis for as long as 17 years (81 issues in all). Although the *Chronicle of the Catholic Church in Lithuania* was intended primarily for the religious and raised mostly religious issues, it turned into a powerful symbol to the world of the resistance of the Catholic Church against Soviet tyranny and provided a lesson in fortitude.

On 22 November 1978, three priests – Alfonsas Svarinskas, Sigitas Tamkevičius and Juozas Zdebskis – informed foreign journalists at a press conference in Moscow that they had established the Catholic Committee for the Defence of Believers' Rights in Lithuania. The Committee was established on 13 November and also included the priests Jonas Kauneckas and Vincentas Vėlavičius. The Committee raised the problem of religious discrimination in Lithuania, claiming that believers did not have the same rights as atheists and that religious freedom was restricted in practice. The Committee sought equal rights with atheists for Catholics, drew attention to discriminatory practices against believers, and requested that their rights be defended. The Committee pursued no political goals and operated for five years. It drew up 53 documents and circulated some of them.

The Catholic Committee for the Defence of Believers' Rights. From the left: Frs Vincentas Vėlavičius, Alfonsas Svarinskas, Sigitas Tamkevičius, Juozas Zdebskis, and Jonas Kauneckas.

From the late 1950s, a few dissident Lithuanian intellectuals began to oppose the Soviet regime. They were reformers and idealists, who tried to force the occupation authorities to adhere to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1948, which up to then was clearly disregarded by the Soviet Union. Their goal was to defend human rights. The year 1960 is considered the beginning of Lithuania's dissident movement. That year, the first Lithuanian dissidents – Aleksandras Štromas, Tomas Venclova and Pranas Morkus – established ties with Moscow dissidents and contributed to their *samizdat* journal *Syntaxis* by providing information from Lithuania. The movement was given impetus by the Helsinki Final Act of 1975, whose signatories (including the USSR) undertook to respect human rights and fundamental freedoms. On the initiative of Russian academician Andrei Sakharov, groups that monitored the implementation of the Helsinki Final Act's provisions and reported on human rights violations were established in the USSR. On 12 May 1976, the first Helsinki Group (headed by Yuri Orlov) was founded in Moscow, and a similar group was founded in Vilnius that fall. Members of the Lithuanian group included the priest Karolis Garuckas, physicist Eitan Finkelstein, poet and former prisoner Ona Lukauskaitė-Poškienė, poet Tomas Venclova and former political prisoner Viktoras Petkus. They maintained ties with the Moscow Helsinki Group and other similar groups in the Soviet Union as well as international human rights organizations. By the start of the revival period in 1988, the Lithuanian Helsinki Group had written up, published in the underground press and sent to Western countries more than 50 documents that exposed the Soviet regime's policies in Lithuania. Thus the democracies in the West learned about the real situation in the USSR, about the violations of human rights there. The Soviet regime's response was to expel some of the well known dissidents, such as Tomas Venclova, and to arrest and convict others, such

as Balys Gajauskas and Viktoras Petkus. Unlike the Catholic opposition, political dissidents raised the issue of Lithuania's freedom.

The Lithuanian Liberty League (LLL), founded in 1978, was noted for its political activism. It had the following goals: the restoration of Lithuania's independence; the fostering of religious, ethnic and political consciousness among Lithuanians; and the advancement of the cause of Lithuania's freedom in international forums. The founder and leader of the LLL, Antanas Terleckas, referred to himself as a resistance fighter. In his opinion, the goal of the LLL was not to reform the USSR, but to restore Lithuania's independence by peaceful means. Among the organization's members was a group of dissidents who had actively opposed the regime more than once. Among those convicted of anti-Soviet activity and imprisoned multiple times were Antantas Terleckas, Romaldas Juozas Ragaišis, Nijole Sadūnaitė and Petras Cidzikas. From 1976 the LLL published the underground newspaper *Laisvės Šauklys* (The Herald of Freedom), and from 1978 the journal *Vytis*, as well as other underground publications.

The LLL placed particular emphasis on the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact signed by Germany and the Soviet Union on 23 August 1939, especially on its secret protocol that divided the territories of Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Finland, Poland and Romania into German and Soviet spheres of influence (with the Baltic countries ceded to Russia). The LLL appealed to the UN General Assembly, demanding the decolonization of the three Baltic States. Of much greater resonance and importance was the so-called Memorandum of 45 Baltic Citizens (the Baltic Appeal), a public letter addressed to UN Secretary-General Kurt Waldheim, signatory states of the Atlantic Charter, and the governments of the Soviet Union, the Federal Republic of Germany and the German Democratic Republic. It was sent on 23 August 1979, the 40th anniversary of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact. The memorandum was signed by 4 Estonians, 6 Latvians, and 35 Lithuanians. The appeal was supported by Sakharov and other members of the Moscow Helsinki Group. This memorandum was the most important document written by the LLL: it drew an international response by requesting the USSR to publicly disclose all the secret protocols of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, annul the pact from its date of signature and eliminate its consequences, i.e., to withdraw foreign troops from the Baltic countries and restore their independence. The appeal was published in the foreign press and became the basis for the European Parliament's decision of 13 January 1983 to support its demands.

The first unauthorized public rally during Soviet times, organized by the Lithuanian Liberty League in Vilnius to mark the 48th anniversary of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, 23 August 1987. Photograph by Romualdas Lankas.

Although constantly persecuted, the LLL was the only underground organization to survive until the revival period. It was then that its active members were released from prison and the organization became legal. One of its first bold moves was to organize a protest rally at the monument to Adam Mickiewicz near the Gothic St Anne's Church in Vilnius on 23 August 1987 to mark the 48th anniversary of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact. The unrelenting protestors publicly encouraged Lithuanians to fight for religious freedom and human rights, not to submit to the Soviet regime and to fight for their country's independence when the time came.

During the 1960s, Western popular music and a youth movement advocating a new kind of lifestyle began to spread throughout Europe and in Lithuania. Youth in Lithuania became dissatisfied with the cultural standards established by the Soviet system. Two different avenues of expression formed: the ethnocultural movement and groups influenced by Western musical and cultural trends (hippies, punks, rockers and others). After the events of 1968 in Prague (the Prague Spring), "organizations without organization" started to form in Lithuania. They united people who had common ideals, interests and goals. Ethnocultural societies or clubs (such as the hikers' club *žygeiviai*) not only collected ethnic folklore and documented folkways but also encouraged the study of Lithuanian history and fostered national consciousness and awareness. Semi-legal clubs for intel-

lectuals became increasingly popular. Until 1965, the number of people who participated in cultural hikes, folklore festivals and other similar kinds of events was approximately 20,000; two years later this number had risen to 200,000. After the regime banned the most important clubs, some of the young people started to join the dissident movement.

Around 1968, inspired by the Prague Spring, the first hippies and other counter-culture groups began to appear. As in the West, the hippy and punk movements in the Soviet Union protested not only against consumerism but against the system itself. The Soviet regime could not tolerate this. The hippies' attention to their own inner world, belief in absolute freedom, anti-militarism (dodging conscription), their provocative dress style and long hair were in sharp contrast to the *homo sovieticus* ideal. They were persecuted, their hair was cut, and reports of their offences were filed. Many of them were expelled from university or other schools.

The apogee of the hippy movement in Lithuania is associated with events that occurred in Vilnius and Kaunas in the early 1970s. In 1971, a restaurant in Vilnius hosted an illegal rock music festival known as the Baltic Congress of Hippies, which was attended by as many as 300 hippies from the USSR. On 14 May 1972, 19-year-old Romas Kalanta, a well-read young man who wrote poetry, played the guitar and gave the impression of a hippy, poured gasoline over himself in a garden near the Musical Theatre in Kaunas. Shouting "Freedom for Lithuania!" Kalanta immolated himself and died in hospital fourteen hours later. This was Lithuania's first case of self-immolation in protest against the occupation regime. In 1969, the Czech student Jan Palach set himself on fire in protest against the Soviet army's invasion of Prague, the demoralization of the Czechoslovakian people by the occupation, and the end of the Prague Spring.

The self-immolation of Kalanta stirred panic in the CPL and security services. Soviet security officers hurried to bury him before the time announced for the funeral. The people who gathered for the funeral were outraged. Mass marches began and political slogans were chanted. Mass demonstrations, violence and arrests continued for several days. They were the largest post-war demonstrations in Lithuania. The unrest was suppressed on 19 May. More than 400 people out of the 3,000 active participants were arrested or detained. Of these, 50 were convicted of criminal offences and 8 were sentenced to between one and three years in prison. In a bid to diminish the importance of this event, the Soviet regime announced that

The protest march along Laisvės (Freedom) Avenue in Kaunas on 18 May 1972. The KGB marked the leaders of the march with numbers for identification.

Kalanta's self-immolation was the result of a severe mental illness. This information was not true; the young man was conscious and aware of his actions.

Kalanta's self-sacrifice received world-wide attention (especially in light of the earlier self-immolation of the Czech student Jan Palach) and focused attention on Lithuania's forcible and illegal occupation. Kaunas residents still commemorate the 14th of May every year. Lithuanians living abroad held commemorations, published a book, erected a monument in St Casimir's Cemetery in Chicago and otherwise memorialized him. Kalanta became a symbol of resistance, and the events in Kaunas activated the movement of informal youth groups. There were about 70 such groups from the 1960s to the end of the occupation. These groups issued anti-Soviet proclamations, flew national flags, celebrated national holidays and drew symbols of national statehood in public places. The Soviet regime could no longer control Lithuanian society.

Dissatisfaction with the existing system and the constraints it imposed grew in many of these informal groups. Only the bravest, those who did not fear the courts, arrests and imprisonment, risked open confrontation with the Soviet regime. For the time being, such people were in a minority. Despite the LLL's lengthy history in fighting for Lithuania's freedom, it was the Lithuanian Reform Movement (*Sąjūdis*) rather than the LLL which became the main driving force behind the restoration of Lithuania's inde-

pendence. The divide between these two movements was not only in their tactics, but also in their different traditions. The LLL was the last resistance organization which breathed life and spirit into the dissident movement during the period of stagnation under Brezhnev. Acting illegally or semi-legally on the eve of the collapse of the Soviet regime, it survived until the revival, and became the first national liberation organization. Meanwhile, the Lithuanian Reform Movement was the national front that united the broadest strata of Lithuanian society. The cultural and academic elite that stood at the forefront of the Movement inspired the nation with the universal ideals of freedom, democracy and independence, which meant so much to an oppressed and occupied nation.

Chapter VI

THE SINGING REVOLUTION

WITH SĄJŪDIS – FOR LITHUANIA!

When Mikhail Gorbachev's reform policy (*perestroika*) began in the USSR in the mid-1980s, the silence in Lithuania was deafening, in contrast with the situation in Moscow, Ukraine and Georgia. The grey first secretaries of the Lithuanian Communist Party's Central Committee, Petras Griškevičius and his successor Rimgaudas Songaila, remained passive, leaving power in the hands of Nikolai Mitkin, the second secretary from Moscow, who did not speak Lithuanian and who sought to "internationalize Lithuania". Secretaries of the Lithuanian Communist Party's town and regional committees continued to follow the Central Committee's instructions. Nothing changed in the provinces. Public discontent increased to such a level that people themselves began to take the initiative.

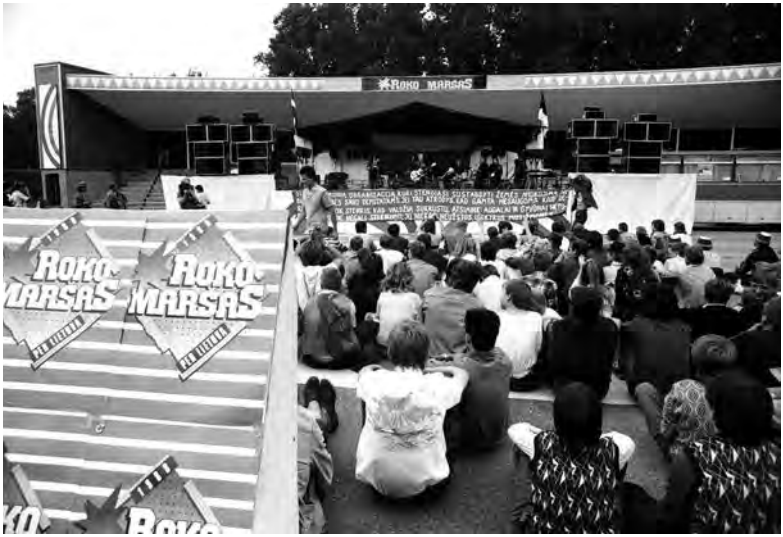
The Lithuanian Reform Movement Sąjūdis in 1988–1990

Various voluntary clubs were formed to discuss environmental, cultural, political and other relevant issues, with the intelligentsia in the lead. Undertaken in the name of *perestroika*, such activities were tolerated by the authorities. The groups began to initiate demands for openness (*glasnost*) and change. Writers organized to demand that Lithuanian, which was being pushed out of public use by Russian, become the official language in Lithuania; that Lithuanian history should be the main subject of school history lessons; and that the so-called "blank spots" in the country's past be filled in. Soon artists, economists and philosophers made their voices heard as well. Thoughtful members of the Lithuanian intelligentsia who opposed the authorities closely observed Gorbachev's reforms and changes taking place in the other Soviet republics. When the Popular Front of Estonia was established as an unofficial reform move-

Sąjūdis badge with the Columns of the Gediminids. Artists Giedrius Reimeris and Algimantas Nasvytis.

ment on 13 April 1988, it became apparent that the Soviet authorities did not take any repressive measures against the most active participants in the movement. On 3 June 1988, a group of Lithuanian intellectuals established an "initiative group" of the Lithuanian Reform Movement (Lith. *Lietuvos Persitvarkymo Sąjūdžio iniciatyvinė grupė*) in the hall of the Lithuanian Academy of Sciences in Vilnius. It soon became known simply as Sąjūdis (pronounced SIGH-you-dis). The initiative group comprised 35 well-known Lithuanian intellectuals (17 of them Communist Party members). There were no dissidents, representatives of government, workers or students among them. From its beginnings, Sąjūdis was different from Czechoslovakia's Prague Spring of 1968, which was led by the ruling party, and from the Polish Solidarity movement, which was led by workers.

As the press became freer, discussions in the clubs began to focus more on history, especially on the events of 1939–1940 in Lithuania. Environmental protection and heritage preservation initiatives gained ground. The Russian press was very influential. During its early stages, Sąjūdis was essentially an offspring of Gorbachev's *perestroika*. In his struggle with the old leaders of the Soviet Union's Communist Party, Gorbachev was compelled to rely on those who supported his reforms, and Sąjūdis supported the reforms initiated in Moscow and tried to implement them in Lithuania. The main slogan of the reforms was "openness, democracy and sovereignty". The greatest attention was paid to cultural and environmental problems, as well as the economy. Well-known Lithuanian economists Kazimieras Antanavičius, Kazimira Prunskienė, Antanas Buračas and Eduardas Vilkas started to discuss publicly questions related to Lithuania's economic independence and came out in support of free enterprise and free markets. They also noted that a republic should not be considered simply a mechanical collection of enterprises nor should the USSR be a mechanical collection of republics. The concept of "sovereignty" changed slowly – at first there was no discussion about changing the political system, and nationality issues were broached very carefully. Slowly people's fears that a person would be arrested, exiled or



"Rock March" concert tour of Lithuania. Concert at the Šiauliai Culture and Leisure Park, July 1988. Photograph by V. Usinavičius.

sent to a psychiatric hospital for expressing opinions contrary to the official line began to dissipate.

A conscious decision was made not to elect a chairman of Sąjūdis's initiative group. Each member presided over meetings in turn. Since the initiative group was made up of intellectuals well known throughout Lithuania and their ideas were supported by many other famous public figures (including the writer Vytautas Petkevičius and the poet Justinas Marcinkevičius), the message about Sąjūdis's initiative group spread very quickly throughout Lithuania. An analogous initiative group was established in Kaunas on 10 June 1988 and another in Klaipėda on 6 July. The first mass meetings were hugely successful and attracted thousands of participants. The first one in Gediminas Square (today Cathedral Square) drew about 30,000 people and another on 9 July attracted about 100,000 to Vingis Park, where Sąjūdis's leadership announced demands to legalize the national symbols – the tricolour flag and the national anthem of independent Lithuania. The so-called Rock Marches became extremely popular. These youth-oriented musical tours took place throughout Lithuania in 1987, 1988 and the summer of 1989. Their purpose was to disseminate Sąjūdis's ideas and to free people from fear of the regime. The Rock Marches were led by Algirdas Kaušpėdas, a member of the Sąjūdis initiative group and lead singer of the

popular rock group Antis. Patriotic speeches at these concerts/demonstrations were made by Sąjūdis members Arvydas Juozaitis, Vytautas Radžvilas and others. The Lithuanian Greens also began to gain strength.

A visit by Alexander Yakovlev, Secretary of the Central Committee of the USSR, to Lithuania on 11–12 August turned out to be useful for Sąjūdis. Yakovlev told its leadership that "the intelligentsia is an expression of the people's self-consciousness". The Party no longer prohibited communists from joining Sąjūdis support groups; it officially recognized the tricolour flag and the Lithuanian national anthem; for the first time, it allowed mention of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact in public at a mass meeting in Vingis Park; and it promised to allow Sąjūdis to publish a newspaper and to have a permanent TV program. Sąjūdis already published a bulletin, *Sąjūdžio žinios* (Movement News), but became even more popular after 16 September, when it began to publish the newspaper *Atgimimas* (Rebirth), edited by the philosopher Romualdas Ozolas.

Sąjūdis's public influence grew. Initiative groups were established throughout Lithuania between July and September of 1988, and meetings with thousands of people were organized in which the original initiative group members participated. The Vilnius group were the acknowledged leaders of Sąjūdis, even though they had been elected only by Vilnians. By the end of October 1988, there were 1,200 Sąjūdis groups registered in Lithuania, with 300,000 members. The number of members was so large because there were no restrictions on membership – Sąjūdis was open to all the people in the country and they could all participate in its campaigns. All who took part in the campaigns felt that Lithuania's future depended on each of them.

Over the course of a few months, Sąjūdis achieved some manifest results. On 6 October, the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the Lithuanian SSR designated Lithuanian as the official national language, legalized the pre-Soviet Lithuanian national anthem, the tricolour flag and the other primary national symbols – the Vytis coat of arms and the Columns of the Gediminids. It also repealed directives that prohibited public meetings, parades and demonstrations. On 21 October, Algirdas Brazauskas assumed the post of First Secretary of the Central Committee of the Lithuanian Communist Party. He gained significant public trust after Sąjūdis's founding congress by returning the Vilnius cathedral to the Catholic Church. During the Soviet period, it had been converted to a picture gallery.

Founding congress of the Lithuanian Reform Movement Sąjūdis in the Vilnius Sports Palace on 22–23 October 1988. Photograph by Vladimiras Gulevičius.

The most important event took place on 22–23 October 1988, when Sąjūdis's founding congress met in Vilnius with 1,021 delegates participating. They included 980 Lithuanians, 9 Poles, 6 Jews and 18 people of other ethnic groups. The majority of attendees by profession were scholars, scientists, writers and artists. The congress was observed by more than 400 correspondents, including over 100 foreign journalists. Lithuania was in the spotlight. The congress adopted a general programme, statutes and 30 resolutions on politics, culture, the economy, public life, democracy and other issues. The general programme stated that the main purpose of Sąjūdis was to support the reform of socialist society on the basis of democracy and humanism, and its main goals were: openness; democracy; political, economic and cultural sovereignty for the Republic of Lithuania; and the rule of law. The programme was phrased to create the impression that Sąjūdis supported the reforms initiated by the USSR's leadership.

During the congress, a 220-member Seimas (parliament) was elected. On 25 November, the musicologist Vytautas Landsbergis was elected Chairman of the Seimas's Council. The grass-roots popular movement seemed ready to challenge the Communist Party. Sąjūdis had become a so-

cial force capable of satisfying public hopes and expectations and of acting as an intermediary between the leadership and the nation. Political parties started to form. In November, meetings and rallies across Lithuania demanded the rejection of proposed amendments to the USSR's constitution that called for greater centralization rather than greater sovereignty for the republics. Some 1.8 million signatures were collected in support of this demand. From autumn of 1988, the Sąjūdis Seimas and its council considered all key draft legislation pending in the Supreme Soviet of the Lithuanian SSR and submitted critical comments and suggestions to that body. As a result of Sąjūdis demands, constitutional amendments that declared the supremacy of Lithuanian laws over those of the USSR, as well as a declaration of the sovereignty of the Lithuanian SSR, were adopted by the Supreme Soviet on 18 May 1989.

Special attention was given to the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact signed between Germany and the Soviet Union on 23 August 1939, which included a secret protocol that divided the territories of Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Poland, Romania and Finland into German and Soviet "spheres of influence". The incorporation of the Baltic States into the Soviet Union had occurred in violation of the USSR's declared principles that nations had the right to self-determination. A state commission established by the Supreme Soviet of the Lithuanian SSR examined and then publicly denounced the Molotov- Ribbentrop Pact and the consequences of its secret protocols – namely, the Soviet occupation of Lithuania in the summer of 1940 and its illegal annexation.

At 7:00 p.m. on 23 August 1989, the populations of the three Baltic States staged a protest campaign called the Baltic Way to mark the 50th anniversary of the signing of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact. The campaign attracted about two million Lithuanians, Latvians and Estonians who joined hands in a 670-km human chain from the Gediminas Tower in Vilnius to the Tall Hermann Tower in Tallinn. The protesters waved black ribbons and burned candles as symbols of mourning for the victims of the occupation regime and the great losses the nations suffered. Under pressure from the Baltic States, the 2nd Congress of the USSR People's Deputies finally denounced the consequences of the secret protocols of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact in December 1989, but without linking them directly to the occupation of the Baltics.

The Lithuanian national liberation campaign became political in 1989.

The Baltic Way – a human chain spanning the Baltic states from Vilnius to Riga to Tallinn on 23 August 1989. Photograph by A. Petrovas.

In March, Sąjūdis candidates won a sweeping victory in the elections to the USSR's Supreme Soviet. Amendments to the Lithuanian SSR's constitution adopted on 7 December stripped the Lithuanian Communist Party of its monopoly on state power and created conditions for various political parties to emerge. This paved the way for Sąjūdis to gain political power legally. The sudden popularity of Sąjūdis and the sheer numbers of its adherents demonstrated a high level of political awareness among Lithuania's population and a fervent desire for independence. There was not a corner of Lithuania that did not have a Sąjūdis branch or initiative group. Sąjūdis's achievements in forcing the Supreme Soviet of the Lithuanian SSR to make decisions reflecting national aspirations reinforced a determination to demand even bigger concessions from Moscow. In just a year and a half, Lithuania had taken a giant step towards the restoration of its independence thanks to the work carried out by the Lithuanian Reform Movement Sąjūdis.

Restoration of Lithuania's Independence

When the Lithuanian Reform Movement became a political movement in late 1989, many of its adherents were members of the Communist Party of Lithuania (CPL), a constituent part of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU), who refused to continue following in-

structions from Moscow. The course of the CPL was significantly altered by the 20th Congress of the Communist Party of Lithuania in December 1989. The CPL had 200,000 members, of whom 70% were Lithuanians. During the congress, 855 of the 1,033 delegates voted for an "independent CPL with its own programme and statute". As a result, the CPL broke with the CPSU, and a national Eurocommunist type of party was created with a reform programme and a new statute. The independent CPL, later renamed the Lithuanian Democratic Labour Party (LDLP), was social democratic in orientation. A minority of communists and the pro-Soviet *Yedinstvo* organization, which operated as a fifth column in Lithuania and opposed the restoration of Lithuania's independence under instructions from Moscow, had little influence. There were no more political threads linking Lithuania to the USSR.

Two major political forces confronted each other during the election campaign to the Supreme Soviet of the Lithuanian SSR in January and February of 1990. One was the Lithuanian Reform Movement Sąjūdis, a national movement that resolutely and openly promoted the idea of restoring Lithuania's independence. The other was the now independent CPL, whose campaign slogan was vague and ill-defined: "A Lithuania without sovereignty is a Lithuania without a future". On the face of it, there was no confrontation between these two political forces. Sąjūdis was preparing to restore Lithuania's independence through parliamentary means, and the independent CPL did not oppose the plan. However, the reform tactics chosen by the CPL were an *ad hoc* step-by-step approach. The CPL had not drafted any legal or political documents to ensure the continuity of the state, and they had no programme for the restoration of the state.

Sensing the direction in which Sąjūdis was going, Moscow did everything to stop the eventual restoration of independence. It resorted to blackmail by threatening to annex Lithuania's Klaipėda region to the Kaliningrad oblast of the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic (RSFSR) and to turn the Vilnius region, with its concentration of Polish and Russian speakers, into an autonomous region or even a mini-Lithuanian SSR if Lithuania failed to abide by the USSR's constitution. Things had gone too far, however, for these threats to frighten Lithuania. The Sąjūdis activists were determined to declare independence. Even Mikhail Gorbachev's visit to Lithuania on 11–13 January 1990 did not persuade them to abandon their plans. Even though Gorbachev argued that Lithuania alone of the republics

Mikhail Gorbachev in Vilnius (11–13 January 1990).
During meetings with the Lithuanian people, Gorbachev was unsuccessful in persuading them to remain in the USSR.
Photograph by Vladimiras Gulevičius and Kęstutis Jankauskas.

In front of the Supreme Council building in Vilnius on 11 March 1990.
The girl's poster has the TS (Lith. abbr. of Soviet Socialist) crossed out from LTSR (Lithuanian SSR), leaving just LR for Republic of Lithuania.
Photograph by Algirdas Sabaliauskas.

After the declaration of Lithuania's independence on 11 March 1990. Leaders of the Supreme Council – Restoration Seimas: Chairman of the Council Vytautas Landsbergis (centre), deputy chairmen Kazimieras Motieka and Bronislovas Kuzmickas (left), deputy chairman Česlovas Stankevičius and member of the Presidium Aloyzas Sakalas (right). Photograph by Paulius Lileikis.

had been able to squeeze what was best out of socialism, for Lithuania the ultimate goal remained independence.

Sąjūdis felt its power. During the elections to the Supreme Soviet of the Lithuanian SSR in February–March 1990, Sąjūdis candidates won 96 of 133 seats. It became obvious that Lithuania was taking a new road. The Communist Party lost its hegemony. The majority of the people had decided to support Lithuania's independence. Decisive and brave actions were taken during the historical session of the Supreme Soviet of the LSSR on 11 March 1990. A group of Sąjūdis deputies had prepared the necessary documents and decided that independence should be declared immediately. True to their campaign promises, on 11 March 1990, the Sąjūdis deputies elected Vytautas Landsbergis, a leader of the Sąjūdis Seimas, as Chairman of the Supreme Soviet of the LSSR. They renamed the Supreme Soviet of the LSSR as the Supreme Council of the Republic of Lithuania, reinstating Lithuania's old state name – the Republic of Lithuania. They also declared that the Vytis was henceforth the official state coat of arms and emblem. At 10:44 p.m., the Act on the Restoration of the State of Lithuania was adopted by an absolute majority of deputies (124 deputies voted for the act, no-

body voted against it and 6 deputies abstained). The Act proclaimed that "the functioning of the sovereign powers of the State of Lithuania, abolished by foreign forces in 1940, is restored and henceforth Lithuania is again an independent state."

The LSSR state emblem is replaced by the Vytis. Photograph by Romas Jurgaitis.

In spirit, the Act of 11 March was close to the Act of Independence declared by the Council of Lithuania on 16 February 1918. The new act, however, was not based on the universally recognized right of nations to self-determination, which would have been politically dangerous. Moscow might then have subjected Lithuania to various exit procedures from the Soviet Union, including nationwide "self-determination" referenda, and imposed on Lithuania part of the USSR's public debts and international commitments. According to the Act of 11 March, the state of Lithuania was restored on its own territory, with its own people, in realization of its sovereignty; it was not administrator of an occupied territory. The Supreme Council of the Republic of Lithuania (later named the Restoration Seimas, abbreviated as SC-RS) began to implement a provision that no other state's constitution was valid in the state's territory. To do so, they had to abrogate the validity of any foreign country's constitutional acts in Lithuania, and, based on arguments of state continuity and identity, to restore the constitution of the last independent state of Lithuania (1918–1940). The Restoration Seimas therefore adopted a Law on the Reinstatement of the 12 May 1938 Constitution of Lithuania. However, this constitution was not put into effect. Within half an hour it was suspended, and a temporary state constitution, the so-called Provisional Basic Law, was adopted. This law recognized the existing social relations and state governance structure that had developed over time in Lithuania, but it repealed all obligations that had been unlawfully imposed on Lithuania and its citizens by the Soviet constitution and its laws. Thus the Lithuanian Reform Movement's election programme plank on the restoration of Lithu-

ania's independence and the removal of its citizens from Soviet jurisdiction was successfully accomplished.

The Lithuanian Reform Movement Sąjūdis was supported by the whole Lithuanian nation and was the source of its power and strength. The movement took advantage of favourable political circumstances. Using nonviolent means of resistance and uniting all social strata under its flag, Sąjūdis led Lithuania to freedom and contributed significantly to the collapse of the Soviet Union and its communist system. Even the usually docile Russians lost their patience after years of listening to lies about the future paradise that communism would create, without any of the promises ever coming true. They were no longer satisfied with just their status as a nuclear and space superpower; they were tired of rationing, poor dental care, empty shops, tiny substandard flats, and queues for everything. As a result, Russia joined the "parade of sovereign nations" when other Soviet republics started to break away. The Act of 11 March was thus Lithuania's biggest contribution to the history of 20th-century Europe.

Awaiting International Recognition

Mikhail Gorbachev and the rest of the USSR leadership did not want to hear anything about the independence of Lithuania and insisted that the Act of 11 March be repealed. Vytautas Landsbergis persistently and firmly held to the moral political principle that "what was stolen must be returned". When Lithuania continued to enforce only its own laws, the USSR began an economic blockade that lasted from 18 April to 29 June 1990. Despite the enormous blow to the country's economy (from a lack of fuel, the suspended operation of the Mažeikiai oil refinery, the closure of several factories due to lack of raw materials, and the consequent unemployment), Lithuania withstood the blockade and was able to get it called off by making temporary concessions. However, Gorbachev issued an ultimatum to the SC-RS on 10 January 1991, demanding that it reinstate immediately the constitution of the USSR. Armoured military vehicles drove out into the streets of Vilnius during the night of 10–11 January. On 11 January, the Soviet army seized the Press Building and buildings of the National Defence Department in Vilnius, Šiauliai and Alytus, and later the Vilnius railway station. Pro-Moscow squads planned to storm the SC-RS and dissolve the Seimas, and the Soviet army and elite units of

Vytautas Landsbergis addresses supporters of the USSR who attempted to break into the Parliament building, 8 January 1991.

Defence barricades around the Parliament building on 14 January 1991. Photograph by Eugenijus Masevičius.

Attack on the Vilnius TV tower: Soviet tanks rolling over peaceful demonstrators. Photograph by V. Usinavičius.

its special forces (Alpha Group) were sent ostensibly to quell civic unrest (which had supposedly been triggered by Prime Minister Kazimira Prunskienė's decision to increase food prices) and to overthrow the lawful Lithuanian government. In reality the civic unrest was fomented by the pro-Moscow remnants of the Communist Party, using the discontent over food prices as a pretext. However, the Soviet attempt to oust the government failed.

On the evening of 12 January, called to action by the leadership of the SC-RS, thousands of Vilnians and people from all over Lithuania came to stand guard at the Seimas (Parliament), the Lithuanian Radio and Television building and the Vilnius TV tower. Concrete walls and barbed-wire barricades were built around the Parliament building. At about midnight, Soviet tanks and armoured vehicles surrounded the TV tower and the Lithuanian Radio and Television station, which thousands of unarmed Lithuanian residents defended only with their bodies. When the Soviet army attacked the TV tower on 13 January 1991, 14 civilian defenders of Lithuania's freedom were killed. The casualties included one young wom-

an, Loreta Asanavičiūtė (born 1967), who was run over by a tank and died in hospital. Over 600 persons were wounded or suffered other traumas.

On 13 January, Lithuania's Seimas addressed the people of the USSR, reminding them that the tragedy in Lithuania was also their tragedy and urging them to do everything possible to stop the Soviet army's aggression. Unlike 1940, when ordinary people were not informed about the imminent threat to their independence, in 1991 the people were not only informed but also urged to defend their state. That same day, 13 January, addressing the large crowd gathered around the Parliament building, head of state Vytautas Landsbergis urged the people to suppress their anger, to resist provocations and to sing. "Song has helped us, it has helped us for hundreds of years. Let's sing now, let's sing sacred hymns, only let's not call each other names, let's not curse and let's not get into fights... Let's be what we ought to be, and our Lithuania will be bright and happy! Let's ignore the shooting, let's sing!"

The events at the TV tower shocked Lithuania and the world. News images of Soviet tanks crushing innocent civilians circulated around the globe. When the victims of 13 January were buried, solidarity bells tolled in Latvia, Estonia, Finland, Sweden, Norway and other European nations. Masses for Lithuania were offered at the Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris and in many churches throughout the world. When Yelena Bonner, wife of the Russian academician Andrei Sakharov and his fellow human rights activist, came to Vilnius after the events of January 1991, she addressed a rally and said that democrats in Russia and the other republics were learning from the Lithuanians. In a March 1991 demonstration in Moscow, more than 200,000 Muscovites shouted the slogans "Hands off Lithuania!" and "Gorbachev, step down!"

The Lithuanian volunteers who stood guard day and night during that tragic time at the nation's heart, its Parliament, managed to withstand armed force and stopped the growing Soviet aggression by peaceful means. The experience of nonviolent resistance was soon applied in the other Baltic States and in the Russian capital of Moscow, where on 19–21 August 1991, during the attempted August putsch, protesters managed to defend the lawful government and democracy. The events of 13 January 1991 in Lithuania can retrospectively be compared with such historical events as the establishment of Poland's Solidarity movement and the demolition of the Berlin Wall. The Solidarity movement began the break-up of the Sovi-

Funeral of the victims of January's aggression – a national protest against the policies of the USSR.

et-dominated Eastern Bloc (the so-called socialist camp) and Germany's reunification ended it. The date of 13 January can be seen as marking the collapse of the Soviet empire itself, because that was when even Russia realized that the USSR was doomed to fail.

The Soviets failed in their attempts to suppress information about events in Lithuania from reaching the rest of the world. When radio transmission was cut off in Vilnius on 13 January, a radio station was launched in Sitkūnai (near Kaunas). Lithuania's authorities kept the United Nations informed about developments in their country and its fight for freedom. Western countries reacted to the events in Lithuania, expressed their support and demanded that the USSR cease military action. The television images of soldiers attacking unarmed civilians was a blow to Gorbachev's image as a reformer and thus further military action was curtailed. Never-

Tearing down Lenin's statue in Vilnius on 23 August 1991. Photograph by Jonas Juknevičius.

theless, Soviet forces continued to control the Lithuanian Radio and Television building and other strategic objects in the country.

The funeral of the victims of 13 January represented the culmination of Lithuania's quest for independence and of the unity between the people and their government. For five days after the January events, no criminal offences were registered in Lithuania. In February, 84% of people with the right to vote participated in a referendum on Lithuania's independence, and 90% of them voted "yes" in favour of independence. After the referendum, the Restoration Seimas adopted a constitutional law that declared Lithuania an independent democratic republic.

Several months passed, however, before Lithuania received international recognition. The West feared that recognition of the Baltic States would undermine Gorbachev's reforms and that he would be overthrown by

the "hawks" in the Soviet government. It was not easy for the West to choose between "Gorby" and Lithuania. Help came from Iceland. On 11 February 1991, Iceland's Althing was the first parliament to recognize Lithuania's independence. In August, after the failure of the Moscow putsch, the road to recognition opened up. In the course of several days, Lithuania was recognized by all the world's major countries, including France (25 August), the United Kingdom (27 August), the USA (3 September) and, finally, the USSR (6 September). Lithuania again appeared on the world map from which it had been forcibly erased in the summer of 1940. International recognition was another of Lithuania's great achievements in the 20th century.

Lithuania rushed to build up its armed forces, to create a diplomatic service and to establish embassies in countries where it had none. Young specialists from various fields poured into the restored Ministry of Foreign Affairs seeking jobs. Many countries invited them to study diplomacy. The young men and women who were selected to serve their country were very ambitious, had good ideas and a great deal of energy. Seeing how young, enthusiastic and unconventional they were, senior Western diplomats nicknamed them the "Baltic Kindergarten".

Catching Up with Western Europe

Even under the difficult conditions of the Soviet occupation, particularly harsh during the Stalinist period, life went on. People had to adapt: they still had to make a living, buy food, find shelter, raise their families and participate in leisure activities. Emigration was not an option. Lithuanians turned out to be very adept at manipulating the socialist system to their advantage. No wonder that Gorbachev claimed that Lithuanians were the most successful of all the Soviet peoples in squeezing the best out of socialism, and thus should be content to stay in the Soviet Union. As an independent country, he said, Lithuania would suffer economic disaster. Because the Lithuanians were forced by circumstances to learn the Russian language well, they had been able to convince, cajole, and manipulate the authorities in Moscow to win major infrastructure projects, and built roads and highways, railways, factories, and power plants in Lithuania. Soviet integrative policies greatly lowered the standard of living in Estonia and Latvia, whose interwar economic indicators were considerably higher than

Chairman of the Supreme Council of Lithuania Vytautas Landsbergis with French President François Mitterrand at the Gate of Dawn during Mitterand's first visit to Lithuania. Vilnius, 1992.

Lithuania's, but Lithuania fared relatively well. During the Soviet period, Lithuania produced as much as Latvia and Estonia combined. The Klaipėda region, formerly contested by Germany and now heavily Russified, and the Vilnius region, which had been occupied by Poland for most of the interwar period, were firmly integrated into Lithuania during the Soviet period. But now that they had regained their independence, the Baltic States had to create their economies anew, address the issue of energy independence, look for new markets and find their place in Europe and the world.

As a fully entitled European state, Lithuania established a government based on the model of Western democracies. The Constitution of the Republic of Lithuania was adopted on 25 October 1992 by voters in a national referendum. The Constitution's preamble notes that the Lithuanian nation "created the State of Lithuania many centuries ago" and "staunchly defended its freedom and independence" through the ages. It establishes the continuity of legal and statehood traditions by referring to the *Lithu-*

anian Statutes of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and the earlier Constitutions of the Republic of Lithuania, as well as to the innate human right "to live and create freely in the land of their fathers and forefathers". Among the stated purposes of adopting the Constitution are: "fostering national concord in the land of Lithuania" and "striving for an open, just, and harmonious civil society and State under the rule of law". The Constitution's main provisions state that Lithuania is an independent democratic republic, that the Lithuanian state is "created by the Nation", that "sovereignty belongs to the Nation", and that the "Nation executes its supreme sovereign power either directly or through its democratically elected officials". The Constitution also separates the judiciary, executive and legislative functions of government, with legislative power granted to the Seimas and executive power shared by the President and the Government (Cabinet). The Constitution also defines the powers to be exercised by each branch and the division of powers between the President and the Government. The fundamental law of Lithuania also guarantees innate human rights and freedoms and the rights of citizens, including those belonging to ethnic minorities. Ethnic communities have the right to foster their language, culture, and customs supported by the State.

Lithuania chose to have its president elected by the entire nation, which means that the Lithuanian form of government is a compromise between a presidential and a parliamentary republic. Society became pluralistic, with as many as 40 parties registered. The Lithuanian political stage, however, was dominated by two key players: the Democratic Labour Party of Lithuania (DLPL), which evolved from the independent Communist Party of Lithuania and later united with another social democratic party to become the Social Democratic Party of Lithuania (SDPL); and the Homeland Union-Lithuanian Conservatives (HU-LC), the political heir of the Lithuanian Reform Movement. The DLPL, led by former Communist Party chair Algirdas Brazauskas, gained a majority during the elections to the Seimas in 1992. In 1993, Brazauskas was elected President of the Republic for a five-year term. In 1996, the Conservatives, whose leader was Vytautas Landsbergis, won the Seimas elections and became the majority party. The society seemed divided into the followers of Brazauskas and the followers of Landsbergis. The situation began to change in 1998, when President Algirdas Brazauskas was succeeded by Valdas Adamkus, who returned from the United States to live in Lithuania. It changed even more after the 2000

Seimas elections, when no party won a majority and a new era of coalition governments began.

But even as governments came and went, necessary reforms were undertaken. When they had lived in a planned economy conducted from Moscow, the Lithuanian people thought that once the means of production were in their own hands, then production could be organized according to their own needs, and the country would flourish. Lithuania wanted to reach a Western European standard of living on a Soviet economic base, but the reality proved this was not possible. The collapse of the Soviet system and the opening of borders to the capitalist Western world revealed the true state of Lithuania's economy. Many industrial enterprises had depended on raw materials from the Soviet Union and on Soviet markets and now became redundant. For example, the machine-tool industry and other prime Lithuanian industries lost most of their orders. Even the free market economy of Finland experienced a drop of more than 10% of GDP because it had exported 22% of its production to the USSR. Once the old economic links were cut, Lithuania could no longer export goods produced by its major enterprises, and in many cases, the quality of the goods produced would not have found markets in the West.

The situation worsened quickly when the prices of strategic raw materials and energy resources suddenly rose. Having lost its old markets, Lithuania's economy experienced a recession in 1992–1994. The country's real gross domestic product (GDP) in 1993 was 40% of its 1988 level. GDP only started to grow again in 1995. Inflation had been rampant in the first few years of independence, but the inflation rate began to shrink in mid-1993 when a national currency, the litas, was introduced and the Bank of Lithuania began pursuing a stricter monetary policy. The introduction of a currency board on 1 March 1994, which pegged the litas to the US dollar at a rate of 4 litas to the dollar, was also a major stabilizing factor. According to economists, the act of pegging the litas to the US dollar was one of the wisest economic policy decisions made by Lithuania during the whole period of its restored independence.

The country's economy faced new challenges in 1998–1999 as a result of the Russian financial crisis. Lithuania faced budgetary difficulties because before the crisis the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) was its major trading partner. In 1998, 36% of total Lithuanian exports went to the CIS, primarily Russia. Exports to the CIS fell by 59% in 1999, and

accounted for just 18% of Lithuania's total exports. Russia received just 7% of Lithuanian exports, while Russian goods accounted for 20% of Lithuania's imports. Due to the crisis, Lithuanian exporters had to reorient themselves from unstable Eastern markets to more demanding Western markets, and the country's main trading partners became Germany and Poland. Although Lithuania experienced budgetary problems and GDP declined by 1.5% in 1999, Lithuania avoided a greater downturn by quickly beginning the process of exporting to the West. This reorientation also served it better in the long term.

Economic difficulties fell heavily on the shoulders of a society which was used to "Soviet order". During a half century of occupation, the Soviets had turned the population of white-collar and blue-collar workers and collective farm labourers into compliant state employees who followed orders given from above. Most people were not ready to lead an independent life. The ship of the planned economy drifted in a sea of capitalism while private agricultural and industrial enterprises were being established slowly, with most oriented towards Western markets. Private enterprises needed start-up capital to begin operating, which they obtained by selling private property bought with investment vouchers, obtaining bank loans or attracting foreign investors. Most state enterprises were privatized during the so-called privatization period. A new business class emerged that operated according to the standards of Western economies.

All the country's citizens theoretically had an equal opportunity to acquire privatized state property with investment vouchers, since the state distributed vouchers to all its citizens in 1991 as part of its privatization programme. Not everyone, however, made proper use of them. A number of voucher buyers who purchased former state enterprises tried to resell them at a profit instead of trying to keep them operating. Many people sold their vouchers and did not even manage to privatize their own residences. Others took advantage of naïve people by pressuring them to sell their vouchers. As a result, the belief that privatization was unfair in principle spread among the population, and doubts remain about whether this was the most efficient method for privatizing the economy. Nevertheless, this approach shaped the country's economic development during the first decade of restored independence.

The government struggled in its efforts to privatize Lithuania's agriculture. The geopolitical situation was changing so rapidly that a comprehen-

sive economic reform programme was not developed, nor was it possible even to imagine the scope of such reforms or consequences of specific policies, since no models for an orderly transition from a command economy to free markets existed. The agricultural reform strategy was developed and implemented in a top-down manner, ignoring the opinions of people actually working in the agricultural sector. Initial legislation called for the restitution of land and property to former owners or their heirs, and the privatization of the assets of collective and state farms. Officially there was a requirement that the agricultural land which was returned was to be used exclusively for agricultural purposes and not be left fallow, but in reality this was often ignored. Some owners who regained their land simply held it waiting for the price of land to rise, viewing their land as a commodity rather than a factor of production. Former farms were in some instances divided among several claimants, and thus made smaller. Because of these land reforms most Lithuanian farms became too small to guarantee a family an income equivalent to the minimum subsistence level. The average size of the newly private farms was less than 6 ha. In neighbouring countries, the typical farm was 5 ha or less: in Poland, such small farms accounted for 72% of all farms, in Latvia – 41%, and in Estonia – 64%.

The agricultural reforms destroyed the Soviet agricultural system – the collective and state farms. When their workers became shareholders, the majority of them simply divided the collective property amongst each other and started to farm on their own. When it became evident that the former collective farmers did not have the means or know-how to become individual farmers, some of them began to set up agricultural companies. However, most of them did not have the skills necessary to compete in the new market economy and went bankrupt within several years. Because the key agricultural reforms were implemented when the Lithuanian Reform Movement Sąjūdis was in power, most of the Lithuanian population blamed the Chairman of the Supreme Council Vytautas Landsbergis for the failed agricultural reforms. However, these difficulties were the consequences of the old economy.

Lithuania's privatization legislation left a huge number of loopholes that allowed privatization to occur without following public tender procedures, and thus allowed state property to pass into private hands for a mere trifle. Agricultural joint stock and investment companies were established to buy privatized property, but there was no legislation concerning the obligations

of the owners of such companies to ensure their viability, and no guarantees were given to people who entrusted their investment vouchers to such companies. Former collective farm chairmen and directors of state farms took advantage of this situation, and in a very short time amassed great riches.

A complex social structure evolved in rural communities. There were the farmers who had taken advantage of support from their collective or state farms pursuant to the Peasant Farm Act and established their own farms; there were those who regained their land and leased or bought additional land regained by others in order to develop a major agricultural business; and there were the former labourers and employees of agricultural companies who moved to new farm settlements, but had no title to land in those settlements. The latter were owners of 2–3 ha plots for whom farming was a way of making a living after losing their jobs and having no opportunity or resources to buy land or move elsewhere. Improvements in the agricultural sector came slowly.

During the first decade of privatization, many of the large companies went bankrupt and thousands of people lost their jobs. Massive unemployment led to massive emigration. Since 1990, more than half a million people have left Lithuania, mainly for the USA, Ireland, the United Kingdom (London), Spain and Norway. Most emigrants are young people of working age who leave for economic reasons, seeking a better life and a safer social environment. Many go abroad to study and do not return. Equally painful for the nation is the "brain drain" of professionals who leave mostly for better salaries and working conditions. When the Lithuanian police started to achieve some success in the fight against organized crime, some of the criminals also emigrated, first terrorizing their fellow Lithuanian emigrants and then also the local inhabitants. Lithuanian criminals abroad have been involved in drug trafficking, human trafficking, automobile theft and other crimes.

Lithuania suffered a shock when several of its major banks failed, with the situation peaking when a moratorium on the activities of two commercial banks was declared in late 1995. The collapse of the banks had a substantial negative impact on the national budget, because about 30% of the country's businesses were directly affected by the bank failures and most of the rest indirectly. Their collapse had an adverse effect on Lithuania's economic and financial development and undermined trust in banks na-

tionally and abroad. Nevertheless, the banking crisis in Lithuania, as well as those in other Central and Eastern European countries, had some positive consequences as well: the banking sectors became stronger, surviving banks started to operate with more caution, their portfolios of bad debts shrank, and bank oversight improved.

Everything was changing, and while change was frightening, some of its aspects were positive and joyous. When Lithuania became independent again, almost all of the country's athletes refused to play for USSR teams or to participate in their championships. Beginning in 1988, many of our country's best athletes – basketball, soccer and handball players – left to play for foreign clubs. When the 4th World Lithuanian Sports Games were organized in the summer of 1991 in Lithuania, however, more than 2,000 Lithuanian athletes from all over the world came to participate. In August 1991, the International Olympic Committee returned international rights to the Lithuanian National Olympic Committee and Lithuanian athletes competed for their country in various international sports at the Olympic Games. Lithuania was proud of its first medals: the discus thrower Romas Ubartas won the newly independent nation's first gold medal at the 1992 Olympic Games in Barcelona; the Lithuanian men's basketball team accomplished a major feat by winning bronze medals at the Olympics in 1992, 1996 and 2000. Lithuania achieved even better results at the European Basketball Championship, finishing second in 1995 and winning the European championship for the third time in 2003 (the first two times were during the interwar period in 1937 and 1939). Lithuania's women basketball players became European champions in 1997.

The educational system was fundamentally restructured over the course of several years, with changes introduced in its administration and in general education, as well as in vocational, secondary, and higher education. The first private schools were opened in 1991–1992. Education in government-funded primary and secondary schools, including vocational schools, is free of charge by law. The state has guaranteed autonomy in academic, administrative, economic and financial matters to schools of higher education, based on principles of self-governance and academic freedom. Tuition and other fees have been introduced for some higher education studies. In a move to integrate its educational system into the European system, Lithuania in 1999 signed the Bologna Declaration, which aims to create a common European higher education area. [In 2006, it implement-

ed the Bologna process. Lithuanian higher education institutions began to take part in EU-funded academic and study programmes.]

The content and quality of study in educational institutions changed fundamentally during the period of independence. Young people gained an opportunity to seek higher education not only in Lithuania, but also in other countries. Book and periodical publishing developed rapidly, along with a network of libraries. These developments led to a well-educated and mobile Lithuanian society receptive to new ideas and capable of competing on an equal footing with their peers in the West, something that seemed an unattainable ideal for most Lithuanians in the early years of the country's independence.

After the tragic occupations of 1940–1990 by the Soviets, the Nazis and then the Soviets again, Lithuanian society began to analyse its historical experience, feeling that it had received a difficult but essential moral lesson: when an invader comes, do not rush to help, to serve or to collaborate because you could be used for cowardly or shameful tasks that will bring shame on you and your nation once it regains its freedom. There were heated debates about those who zealously collaborated with the Nazis and the Soviets, about the role of Lithuanians in the Holocaust, about the deportations to Siberia and Soviet repressions. Issues regarding de-Sovietization and lustration of collaborators were addressed, but slowly, hesitantly and incompletely.

During the first decades of independence, Lithuania had to catch up with the West, to learn about many new innovations and how to apply them. Other post-communist countries faced similar problems. Although reforms were sometimes painful to experience, major obstacles were overcome, and Lithuania in a short time became a functioning democratic country in the Western mould.

Relations with Neighbours and Transatlantic Integration

When comparing the foreign policy of independent Lithuania during the interwar period and that of Lithuania after 1990, one can see basic differences. During the interwar period, Lithuania conflicted with Germany over the Klaipėda region and with Poland over the Vilnius region. At the end of the 20th century, the situation was very different.

Signing a treaty with Russia: Vytautas Landsbergis and Boris Yeltsin stand in the centre.

Germany had been forced out of East Prussia (currently the Kaliningrad region of Russia) after World War II and, having no border with Lithuania, laid no claim to the Klaipėda region, which was populated in 1990 mostly by Lithuanians. Lithuania's relations with its neighbour Poland improved because the demographic situation in the city of Vilnius had changed over half a century. Many Poles had been repatriated to Poland after World War II and Poles now accounted for only 20% of the city's population. Initially, fomented by Moscow, Sovietized Polish communist functionaries agitated for autonomy for the heavily Polish Vilnius and Šalčininkai regions, but Lithuania's relations with Poland did not suffer even when Lithuanian authorities were forced to introduce temporary direct rule in the territory. Warsaw understood who was behind the unrest. After long negotiations, Lithuania and Poland signed the Lithuanian-Polish Friendship and Cooperation Treaty on 26 April 1994. Among other items, the treaty's preamble refers to previous territorial disputes between Lithuania and Poland, condemns the use of violence in past relations between the two nations, and formally ratifies the integrity of the current territories, with their capitals in Vilnius and Warsaw, "now and in the future". Both states pledged to base their relations on mutual trust and respect, pursue policies befitting good neighbours, and support each other's integration into the family of Western nations. The ratification of the treaty and its coming into force meant that Poland formally renounced any claims to the Vilnius region. Lithuania

Pope John Paul II during his visit to Lithuania, accompanied by President Algirdas Brazauskas and Vilnius Archbishop Metropolitan Cardinal Audrys Juozas Bačkis, 4 September 1993, Vilnius.

similarly lost its right to make territorial claims on Sejny (*Seinai*) or Punsk (*Punskas*). Nonetheless, past history and national minority issues continue to provoke heated discussions from time to time.

After the restoration of independence, Lithuania gained a border with Russia's Kaliningrad region in the west. (The Potsdam Conference had given the USSR the right to administer the Königsberg region for fifty years, but it was renamed Kaliningrad by the Russians in 1946 and incorporated into the RSFSR.) Democratic Russia, which like Lithuania wanted to leave the Soviet Union, openly supported Lithuania's fight for independence. The day after the massacre in Vilnius on 13 January 1991, Boris Yeltsin, then chairman of the Russian Supreme Soviet, addressed the Soviet military forces serving in the territories of Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia. He urged them not to succumb to reactionary forces and to think about the future of Russia and its nationalities before attacking civilian targets in the Baltic States. Friendly relations between Vytautas Landsbergis, Chairman of the Restoration Seimas, and Boris Yeltsin, who was elected President of the RSFSR in June 1991, enabled the drafting of a treaty between Lithuania and Russia. Landsbergis and Yeltsin signed the Treaty on the Foundations of Interstate Relations between Lithuania and Russia on 29 July 1991, and

President of the Republic of Lithuania Valdas Adamkus and NATO Secretary General George Robertson in Vilnius during the international conference on "NATO's Role in the Changing Security Environment in Europe" on 19 May 2000.

it went into effect a year later. According to the treaty, Russia recognized Lithuania's independence and expressed support for eliminating the consequences of annexation by the Soviet Union in 1940, while Lithuania recognized Russia as an independent state. Diplomatic relations were established between the two states in the beginning of October.

In October 1997, the Republic of Lithuania and the Russian Federation signed an Agreement on the State Border between Lithuania and Russia and the Treaty on the Delimitation of the Exclusive Economic Zone and Continental Shelf in the Baltic Sea. Although Russia remains a very important economic partner for Lithuania, closer ties between the two states did not develop. The main obstacles have been the countries' different geopolitical orientations in foreign policy and their differing views of recent history and democracy. The objective of President Vladimir Putin's "controlled democracy" regime is to regain influence in the so-called post-communist sphere, especially in the territory of the former USSR. Lithuania chose the road of Euro-Atlantic integration. Thus on 8 June 1992, it adopted the Constitutional Act on the Non-Alignment of the Republic of Lithuania with Post-Soviet Eastern Unions (a similar decision was taken by Latvia and Estonia). Lithuania insists on principle that Russia, as the suc-

cessor state of the former Soviet Union, should assume the rights and obligations of the USSR, and therefore should compensate Lithuania for the losses it incurred during almost half a century of Soviet occupation. Russian authorities refer to the collapse of the USSR as a geopolitical disaster, although they have condemned the aggression of the Soviet Union against the three Baltic States. They claim that Lithuania, Estonia and Latvia willingly joined the USSR and that the USSR cannot be blamed for its actions at the time, maintaining that they were the result of the international environment.

Independent Lithuania sought to establish good relations with the new state of Belarus. In October 1991, Lithuania and Belarus signed a declaration on the principles of neighbourly relations, and, four years later, agreements on neighbourliness and cooperation as well as on the state border between the two countries. Economic relations developed well, but political relations were complicated by President Alexander Lukashenko's dictatorial rule.

On 12 May 1990, Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia renewed the Treaty on Concord and Cooperation of 1934 between the Baltic States (now called the Declaration on Unity and Cooperation) and established the Baltic Council to renew the tradition of cooperation among the three governments. It became the Baltic Council of Ministers on 13 June 1994. Close cooperation between the Baltic States helped them to integrate into transatlantic organizations successfully.

Like its neighbours, free Lithuania aspired to join the most important international democratic organizations in the Western world in order to ensure its status in the international community. It became a member of the United Nations on 17 September 1991 and later that year joined its specialized agencies, including UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) and the ILO (International Labour Organization). Lithuania became a member of the Council of Europe in 1993, and, most importantly, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the European Union (EU) in 2004. The basic precondition for Lithuania to join Western security organizations was the successful withdrawal of Russian troops, which occurred on 31 August 1993.

Lithuania embarked on its road to NATO in December 1991, when it joined the North Atlantic Cooperation Council. In January 1994, Lithuanian President Algirdas Brazauskas sent a letter to Manfred Wörner, Secre-

President Algirdas Brazauskas and Minister of Foreign Affairs Antanas Valionis sign the EU Accession Treaty in Athens, 2003.

tary General of NATO, stating that Lithuania wished to become a member of the organization. Lithuania joined the Partnership for Peace initiative that same month. In May 1999, the NATO Summit in Washington recognized Lithuania's efforts and progress and adopted the NATO Membership Action Plan. Seven NATO candidate countries were invited to begin negotiations to join NATO in November 2002: Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia. The resolve to join NATO was particularly strengthened by the historic words of US President George W. Bush on 23 November 2002 in Vilnius. Mr. Bush said, "Our alliance is determined to defend its members. Anyone who would choose Lithuania as an enemy has also made an enemy of the United States of America." George Bush also reminded everybody that the USA never recognized Lithuania's incorporation into the USSR and always believed that the European continent "would not remain divided for ages." After the requisite protocols to the Washington Treaty were signed in March 2003 and the Seimas ratified the Washington Treaty, Lithuania became a fully fledged member of NATO on 29 March 2004. The main advantage of NATO membership is highlighted in Article 5 of the Washington Treaty, which guarantees defence by the whole of the alliance in the event of an armed attack on any one of its members. In other words, none of the member states need to rely on only their own efforts and resources in case of attack, but can rely on all other members to come to their aid, both singly and collectively.

Since Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia do not have the equipment or resources to protect their own air space, the old NATO member states have

been patrolling the Baltic airspace from the time those countries joined NATO. NATO membership means not only greater security guarantees, but also commitments to maintain stability and peace in Europe and beyond. Lithuanian servicemen have taken part in international missions in Iraq, Afghanistan, Kosovo, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Georgia. Lithuania was offered the opportunity in late 2004 to head an international NATO team for the reconstruction of Afghanistan's Ghor province. The purpose of the mission was to create conditions there to ensure stability and security and help the country's central authorities expand their role in the region. [From 2005–2013, Lithuania's Ministry of National Defence allocated over 300 million litas (EUR 86.5 million) for activities of the Provincial Reconstruction Team in Ghor, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs spent over 17 million litas on development projects. Civilian projects in Ghor province were mostly funded by Japan and the US.]

Lithuania was determined to strengthen democratic values in order to be a worthy member of the Western community of nations. Policies included ensuring opportunities for ethnic minorities to use and foster their own languages and cultures; restoring to religious communities churches and synagogues and other property that had been nationalized; assessing what had occurred during the Holocaust; locating and returning scattered Jewish cultural treasures (300 Torahs and documents of the YIVO Institute were saved); fighting against anti-Semitism and racial and religious intolerance; and guaranteeing freedom of speech, freedom of the press and democratic elections.

Integration into the European Union (EU) was the second most important strategic foreign policy objective of independent Lithuania (NATO membership was the first). The EU was created by the Maastricht Treaty in 1992, which came into force in November 1993. On 14 December 1990, the heads of the Baltic States made their first appeal to the European Economic Community (EEC, the predecessor of the EU). They asked that political, economic and cultural support be given to them directly, not through the Soviet Union. After the events of 13 January 1991 in Lithuania, the EEC strongly condemned the use of force in the Baltic States. In 1992, Lithuania and the EU signed the Trade, Commercial and Economic Cooperation Agreement and a declaration on political dialogue between the EU and Lithuania. As soon as official diplomatic relations were established, the EU started to offer assistance to Lithuania through the PHARE programme.

Three years later, the EU signed Association Agreements with Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia, recognizing the Baltic States' objective to become EU members. Lithuania joined the EU on 1 May 2004, attaining the right to create its own future and the future of the European continent together with other democratic states.

After Lithuania joined the EU, the volume of its trade and the production of export goods increased. Increased exports encouraged more foreign capital investment in Lithuania's economy and increased domestic competition, resulting in more rational allocation of labour and capital. EU membership limited the Lithuanian government's power to interfere directly or indirectly in the functioning of the country's economy and resulted in more freedom and opportunities for Lithuanian enterprises and consumers. On the other hand, the mandatory nature of EU regulations sometimes provokes discussions about restrictions on the nation's sovereignty. Nevertheless, when Lithuania became a member of the EU, new markets were opened up, de-monopolization began, economic efficiency and the supply of goods and services increased, and new opportunities arose to develop education and culture and address social issues. Consumers are the big winners of EU membership.

As an EU member state, Lithuania is bound by EU rules and regulations concerning residence and citizenship. A national of any EU country is automatically also an EU citizen. According to the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, EU citizens have the right to move freely and establish residence anywhere within the EU; to vote in municipal and European Parliament elections in their country of residence and to stand as candidates in such elections; to be protected by the diplomatic and consular authorities of any EU country anywhere in the world; and to petition the European Parliament and complain to the European Ombudsman. EU membership is associated with the stability of those institutions that serve as guarantors of democracy, the rule of law, human rights and respect for the protection of minorities.

As a member of the EU, Lithuania has a voice in Brussels and can express its position on various issues and even influence EU decisions. It is represented by its commissioner in the European Commission and has 11 members in the European Parliament. Although the impact of a single state on EU decisions is not great, the collective power of Central and Eastern European states on specific questions on which they may hold similar

positions could potentially be significant. Lithuania had to pay a price to enter the EU. One of the most striking examples was the unwritten requirement to decommission the Ignalina nuclear power plant, which Western Europeans considered unsafe. The EU pressured Lithuania to close the plant as a precondition for membership, so Lithuania reluctantly conceded because the country's strategic goals were of paramount importance. The country's energy production capacity, however, suffered as a result. [On 1 January 2015, Lithuania became a member of the Eurozone, replacing its national currency, the litas, with the euro. This completed Lithuania's integration into European structures.]

By successfully participating in a variety of NATO and EU activities, Lithuania has markedly strengthened its security and international status, and has become stronger economically. Lithuania is now a fully fledged democratic European state. The future of Europe will be determined collectively by all EU member states and the decisions they make.

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Photos from Office of the Chief Archivist of Lithuania, the Genocide and Resistance Research Centre of Lithuania, the Museum of Genocide Victims, the Nacional Museum of Lithuania, the Lithuanian Central State Archives, the Vilna Gaon State Jewish Museum, the collections of the Science and Encyclopaedia Publishing Centre (the 1918–1940 map of Lithuania), The Wroblewski Library of the Lithuanian Academy of Sciences, the collections of Eugenijus Peikštenis and Vytautas Jasiūnas, *Lietuvos diplomatija nuo 1990 m. kovo 11* (Vilnius: Lietuvos užsienio reikalų ministerija), 2001; *Lietuva, 1991 sausio 13*. Dokumentinė medžiaga. Vilnius: Spaudos departamentas, 1991; *Antanas Smetona ir jo aplinka* (Vilnius, 2012) by A. Eidintas and the personal archives of A. Eidintas and A. Bumblauskas.

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This book is a history of the Lithuanian state in its European political and cultural context from its beginnings to 2004. The restoration in 1990 of Lithuania's independence and status as a free nation which chose to orient itself toward the West and Western ideals of democracy has given a fresh impetus to historians and scholars in Lithuania and abroad to look anew at this country's heroic and brave as well as tragic and sad history. In 2012, Lithuania was preparing to assume the Presidency of the Council of the European Union in the second half of 2013. As part of the preparations, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs initiated a project to prepare a popular history of Lithuania that could be distributed as a souvenir gift to the diplomats and dignitaries of the EU states and others who would be coming to meetings in Vilnius in the second half of 2013. The main purpose of its authors was to inform the visitors about Lithuania's past in a concise format. The book was first written in Lithuanian and initially translated into English, French, German, Spanish, Polish and Russian, subsequently into Latvian and Belarusian. Albanian and Japanese translations are pending as of this printing.

ISBN 978-609-437-163-9

THE HISTORY OF LITHUANIA

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Revised Second Edition

Translated and edited by Skirma Kondratas and Ramūnas Kondratas
Cover by Audronė Uzielaitė
Layout by Ernestas Vinickas

Published by "Eugrimas" Publishing House, Gedimino av. 21/2, LT-01103 Vilnius
Tel./fax: +370 5 273 39 55, email: info@eugrimas.lt, website: www.eugrimas.lt

Printed by UAB BALTO Print, 41a Utenos St., Vilnius LT-08217