

# bridges



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**Front Cover:** Traveler Aurimas Valujavičius reached the shores of the United States after rowing solo across the Atlantic in his rowboat *Lituanica*.

**Back cover:** Traveler Aurimas Valujavičius was greeted by Lithuanian Americans in the World Lithuanian Center in Lemont, Illinois.

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EDITOR  
Karilė Vaitkutė

ART DIRECTOR  
Skaistė Bosas

CONTRIBUTING EDITOR, CURRENT EVENTS  
Alan J. Stankus, P.E. (ret)

ADVERTISING & SUBSCRIPTION MANAGER  
Tomas Petrolionas

**Editorial Office**  
139 Willow Blvd., Willow Springs, IL 60480  
kariledalia@yahoo.com

**Subscriber Services and Advertising**  
spauda@javlb.org

**Facebook**  
facebook.com/BridgesLithuanianAmericanMagazine



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finansai@javlb.org

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## from the editor

Dear Reader,

You are reading the May issue of Bridges. If it is the paper and not the online version of the magazine, it is one of the last three. Starting September 2023, we will stop publishing the paper Bridges and continue with the online version only. We hope that you will continue reading the magazine online. If you have questions regarding switching from the paper to the electronic version, please write to our administrator Tomas Petrolionas at spauda@javlb.org.

Recently we have witnessed a remarkable and daring event – Aurimas Valujavičius, a young and brave traveler from Lithuania, crossed the Atlantic Ocean rowing alone from Spain to the United States in a rowboat he named *Lituanica*. He is only the third person in the world to accomplish such a journey. Aurimas did it in honor of the two Lithuanian American pilots, Steponas Darius and Stasys Girėnas, who flew over the Atlantic in 1933 but, as we all know, tragically died after their plane *Lituanica* crashed. In this issue of Bridges, you will read about Aurimas's journey and how he was greeted by Lithuanian Americans.

In this issue, you will also read an article by Prof. Juozas Skirius about the time when a delegation of Lithuanian Americans first visited the White House and met with the president. Lithuanian diaspora was always very strong in the United States. The first wave of immigrants worked hard, built churches and schools, founded organizations, fostered traditions, and helped Lithuania financially and politically in its fight for independence. The second wave of immigrants after the Second World War strengthened the communities with the influx of writers, scientists, artists, teachers, and other professionals, and continued raising the name of Lithuania in the US. The current Lithuanian American communities are especially vibrant in continuing to foster the language, culture, and traditions by participating in many organizations. The ties with Lithuania are as strong as ever. At the same time, in the past year and a half, we especially feel how fragile freedom and independence are. Russia's war in Ukraine reminds us every day that we need to be united and strong in the face of danger coming from Lithuania's aggressive neighbor.

On a lighter note, in May, we celebrate Mother's Day. In Lithuania, it is the first Sunday of May and in the US, it is the second Sunday of May. And so, we have a chance to celebrate it twice. Happy Mother's Day to all Mothers!

Sincerely,

**Karilė Vaitkutė,**  
Editor



# A solo row by a brave Lithuanian traveler across the Atlantic to commemorate the flight of two Lithuanian American pilots

Karilė Vaitkutė

Ninety years ago, two incredibly brave Lithuanian American pilots, Stephen Darius and Stanley Girenas, flew over the Atlantic Ocean in a small plane named Lituanica. They were seeking to make Lithuania, a small country that had recently gained its independence, known to the world. Tragically, their brave venture ended with the death of both pilots when they crashed in the woods of Soldin, just a few hundred miles short of their destination, Kaunas, the then capital of Lithuania. The heroism of the two pilots is commemorated every year and will never be forgotten.

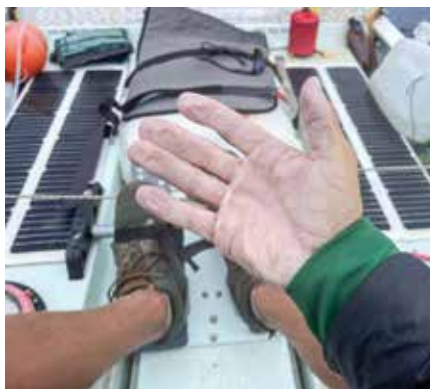
However, this year, the flight of Lituanica was commemorated in a truly special way – a 28-year-old traveler from Lithuania, Aurimas Valujavicius, crossed the Atlantic rowing solo in a row boat he named Lituanica. He became the first in Lithuania and the third in the world to cross the Atlantic this way. Aurimas spent 120 days, 14 hours, and 48 minutes in the ocean and rowed over three thousand miles from Ayamonte, Spain to Florida in the United States.

After he reached the shore, Aurimas was greeted by Lithuanian Americans, first in Miami, then in Washington, DC, and Lemont, Illinois. He has met with Lithuania's ambassador in the US, Audra Plepyte, and the US

senator of Lithuanian descent, Richard Durbin.

As I was standing in the crowd that came to greet Aurimas in the Lithuanian World Center in Lemont, Illinois, I had many questions in my head. How does one prepare for this kind of adventure? What were the best and the worst moments in the middle of the vast waters? What was his sustenance, how did he feed himself? Aurimas answered many of those questions.

First of all, it should be said that Aurimas is a seasoned traveler. The crossing of the Atlantic was his tenth (and biggest) adventure. In 2015, he biked 1500 miles from Lithuania to Norway and back. It took him 19 days. In 2016 he rode his bike from Lithuania to Slovakia and back. It took him 15 days to ride 800 miles. In 2017 he rode 600 miles by bike in Namibia, Africa. In 2018, he traveled for two months in Bali and sailed 600 miles by canoe from Belorussia to Lithuania. In 2019, Aurimas traveled by bike around Scandinavia for 200 days and made a total of 850 miles. In 2000, he made 1800 miles by canoe in the Danube River, rowing through 10 European countries. In 2021, he climbed to the 12 most dangerous volcanoes in Chile. In 2022, he biked more than 600 miles in the jungles of Indonesia. These are impressive travels that can put to the test a person's physical and





emotional strength and endurance.

For his solo rowing across the Atlantic Aurimas was preparing for two years. The preparation included purchasing the rowboat, training, and learning of all the possible challenges that could await him in his adventure. Aurimas is the fourth owner of the boat. The owner before him was Jasmine Harrison, a woman from the UK who was the youngest female to row the Atlantic from Spain to Antigua in 70 days at the age of 21. In his talk to Lithuanians in Lemont, Aurimas mentioned that there were about 1500 people who crossed the Atlantic by boat, and 184 who did it solo. So why do we say that he is the third person in the world to do it? It is because he rowed solo from the continent of Europe to the continent of America, not from the Canary Islands to the Caribbean islands, as did the most. He started on December 26, 2022, just after Christmas. However, he was planning to start a month earlier but the weather did not permit him to do so. Aurimas had to wait for the right weather to start. It turned out to be a very important factor as in bad weather one cannot start rowing from the continent. It is just physically impossible. That is why most start their voyage from the Canary Islands.

Aurimas shared that the most difficult parts of his journey were the first month in the beginning and the very last hours when he was already close to Miami, Florida. He came into Castle Harbor, a small port in Florida, close to Miami on April 25, 2023. According to the adventurer, the most difficult was the beginning of the journey because he had to adjust to being alone in the middle of big



waters. However, after he adjusted, he started enjoying his trip and felt absolutely at peace with the ocean and with himself. Having had to spend four months alone, he, in his words, made friends with himself and had the opportunity to think about every little thing about his life. He thought about his friends, about his parents, about what he did right or wrong in his life. There were moments when he had to think what to think about, he had so much time.

What were the most enjoyable moments? Aurimas told that those were undoubtedly the moments he had an opportunity to meet some sea creatures. He saw dolphins playing, he saw whales, even swam with the whales, and he saw a variety of fish. Of course, those encounters only



constituted less than one percent of his time on the water. Dolphins would come and play nearby for perhaps five to ten minutes at a time. Whales would stay just a little bit longer, perhaps ten to fifteen minutes at a time. Those encounters, though, sustained Aurimas for a long time, as he was remembering them and enjoying the memories. As far as encountering other things passing by, Aurimas remembers seeing a trash can floating by. Of course, what a sad reminder of the present-day waste. And what about people? On the 79th day of his journey, Aurimas encoun-



tered a catamaran. The sailors asked if he was alright and perhaps his sail was broken. They were surprised to learn Aurimas was rowing solo across the ocean in a row boat, not a sailboat. Who wouldn't be surprised to meet a solo rower in the middle of an ocean? Other encounters with people were over the Internet. Aurimas would talk to his parents and friends. Rowing for 12-14 hours a day could become monotonous. After the sun sets, it would be nice to go inside the boat and rest but Aurimas could not do that because he had to finish his daily rowing time. So, weather permitting, he would place his laptop in front of him and talk to his friends or watch a movie to help shorten the time.

It was not so easy to get in and out of his sleeping place. He had to wait for the right moment to pen the doors and to get in or out so that the salty sea water wouldn't get inside. Aurimas said that the salty sea water 'eats everything'. He even started thinking of it as some "sulphuric acid" that destroys everything. Sea water can corrode equipment in a short time, and equipment is very important for a sailor to communicate with the world. Also, wounds don't heal as quickly when you are on the ocean.



Aurimas was lucky in this respect. He only had one cut to his arm. It was not a big deal, according to him, but it still was healing for three weeks.

Talking about what could go wrong, Aurimas named many things. One of them was being injured by his own oars. It didn't happen to Aurimas because of his skill but there are stories about how oars hit was a wave could even knock out a rower's teeth. The waves and the wind are a rower's friends but only if he knows how to control and manage them. Still water, on the other hand, is the enemy because a rower needs to use all his physical strength rowing to advance. That was what did not help Aurimas reach a world record. In the middle of his journey, he

had a week of very still water and no wind which slowed him down quite a bit. Among other dangers would be swordfish because those fish could pierce through a boat. And not only through a boat but through a sailor's vital organs, such as lungs or liver, as well. That would be unfortunate and would end not only the journey but the life of a sailor altogether. Again, Aurimas was very fortunate in that respect. Also, his boat capsized only once. That in itself is not dangerous as these kinds of boats are built in such a way that after turning on the side they go back to being in the original position. Aurimas remembered that the first owner of his boat, a German man, capsized more than thirty times.

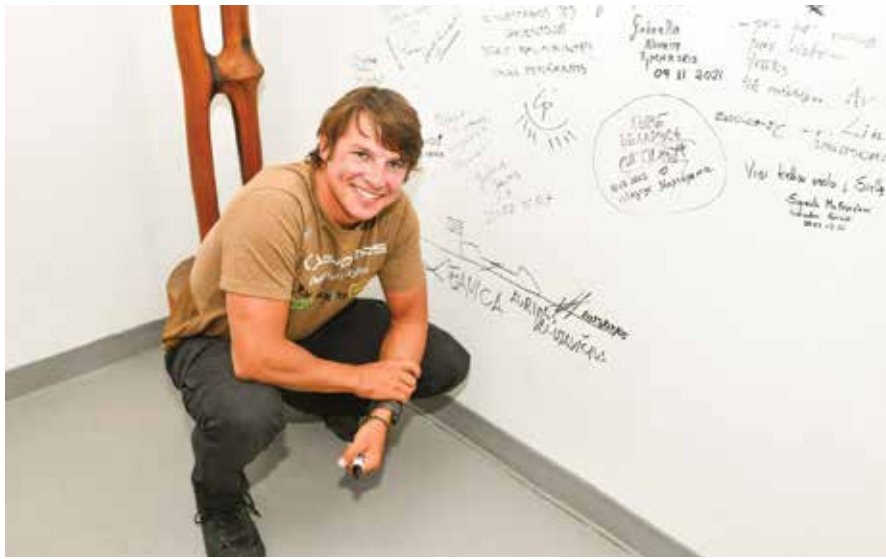
Now what about the food and water on the boat? Aurimas said he had food on the boat that constituted one million calories. It was a supply for 140 days. He was supposed to eat 7 to 8 thousand calories per day in order to be physically fit to row. He only consumed 4 thousand calories per day. He lost some weight but otherwise, he looked very strong and fit. He said he felt the same as well. Once, he remembers, he caught a fish, a mahi-mahi. He ate one filet raw with just soy sauce on it, and another filet



he dried for three days in the sun on the top of his boat. Both filets seemed to him incredibly tasty. As far as drinks, he had perhaps fifteen cans of his favorite Sprite. However, due to corrosion, the liquid in the cans was disappearing and when Aurimas would open a fresh can, he would just find a gulp or so of the drink inside, which, of course, was disappointing.

What is in the traveler's future? After making about two million oar strokes rowing across the Atlantic, Aurimas says that he is not seeing himself rowing for perhaps five years. However, he will keep the boat which means that he will still be rowing it at some point in the future. However, his next journey will not involve traveling on the water. He should announce his plans for the next trip in late fall or early winter. But his immediate job will be





to make a documentary, a tutorial of sorts on how to row the Atlantic. Throughout his journey, Aurimas was using cameras and drones to film his every day and we should be able to see the film in January of next year. As far as coming back to the United States, Aurimas said that might happen in a year or two. Anyways, he would at least have to water the oak tree he planted in the back of the World Lithuanian Center building in Lemont, Illinois.

We are immensely proud of Aurimas and his accomplishments and we wish him the best of luck in his future endeavors!





# Lithuanian American Delegation's First Visit to the United States President

Prof. Juozas Skirius

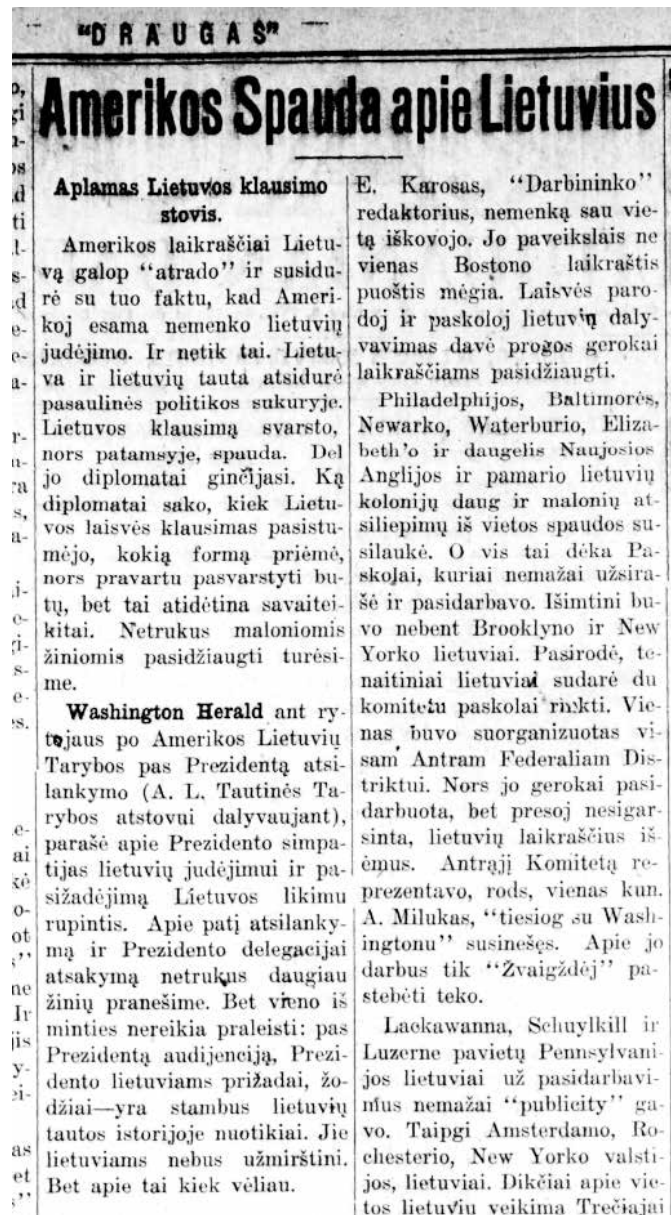
Vytautas Magnus University, Kaunas, Lithuania

*One hundred and five years ago, a turning point in the political life of Lithuanians in the USA took place when for the first time in the history of the Diaspora, Lithuanians succeeded to be invited to the White House for a conversation with President Woodrow Wilson. The meeting took place on May 3, 1918. This fact showed that the United States administration recognized American Lithuanians and their organizations as a part of American society which had some political weight. It was the result not only of the active work of the diaspora, but also of the united Lithuanian American General Convention, which took place in New York on March 13-14, 1918. The visit to the White House was widely publicized by the American press. On May 9, the Lithuanian American daily newspaper Draugas wrote: "The American newspapers have finally "discovered" Lithuania and have been confronted with the fact that there is a considerable Lithuanian movement in America. And not only that. Lithuania and the Lithuanian nation have found themselves in the vortex of world politics." [1]*

Why was it necessary to meet the United States President?

The Kaiser's German government recognized Lithuania's statehood on March 23, 1918. However, it did that not based on the Act of February 16th, but based on the Act of December 11, 1917, which "chained" Lithuania to Germany. Lithuania's status would be the same as that of Bavaria or Saxony in the German Empire. This recognition was contrary to the slogans of Lithuanian Americans. They realized that this recognition is both the monarchy's demand for Lithuania and, at the same time, felt that Lithuanians were in danger of compromising themselves in the eyes of the United States government, which was at war with Germany.

In order to turn the development of events in its favor, on April 26, 1918, the leaders of the Lithuanian American Catholic political organization, the Lithuanian American Council (LAC), addressed the United States State Department, asking to recognize Lithuania's independence and this way help stop German interference in Lithuania's political affairs. However, the Americans were not prepared to grant such requests because the Germans were still strong, and, as historian Antanas Kučas wrote, Lithuania's independence existed only on paper [2]. Besides, the activities of the Lithuanian National Council (LNC),



which was at the mercy of the occupying Germans, were the basis for the West to regard it as pro-German, as Germany's collaborator. However, that was wrong. The fact that the LNC dared to proclaim the Act of February 16th, which at that time had not yet been properly evaluated by foreign countries, is quite telling. And unfortunately, Germany's opponents did not understand or did not want to understand the difficult situation the LNC was in at that time, its attempts at maneuvering, and temporary

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# LIETUVA

—ed as Second Class matter July 13th 1903, at the Post Office of Chicago, Illinois, under Act of March 3rd, 1879.

Metai XXVI

CHICAGO, ILL., PENKTADIENIS, GEGUŽIO (MAY) 10 d., 1918 M.

## Wilsonas žada remti Lietuvos Nepri gulmybę.

Prezidentas Wilsonas priima Lietuvių Delegaciją ir sako, kad Lietuva turi būti laisva.

tier armijos, turėjo su savim pasą, kuriame jis buvo paskelbtas kaip mąrys Amerikos ambulatorių tarnystės Francuzoj.

"Belaisviai atvirai pripažįsta, kad Amerikos laisvai paprastai pastoja į Amerikos ambulatorių tarnystę laike pabėgimo Europos ir taip toki perėjusis per Atlantiją su ligonbutnių laivų išėdus Francuzoj, juos tuojaus perkels į ambulatorių laivus, o iš ten į orelavimkybę.

"Sugautasai vienok orelavimkybės, apie kurį mirsta augšliau, buvo perkeltas tiesiog iš ambulatorių tarnystės į orelavimkybę."

Anglijos administracija jau nūgrėbė tai, kad Amerikos laisvai plaukia Europos ant ligonbutnių laivų. Administracija sako:

tautą su palėpimais tuos popierius atpausindini. Tarp jų buvo ir organeliška kopija Nikolajaus atsisakymo nuo sosto.

Dekretą apie Nikolajaus atsisakymą nuo sosto paliepta apskelbti spalio 30 d. 1905 m., bet kadangi sulgy oficialis tvarkos, toki dokumentai turėjo jereiti per Justicijos (teisų) ministerį, tai Kedriuskis atdefonavo kaslink to atšakacijos dokumento Segehovtorui, kuris taomet buvo Justicijos ministeris. Tas atsitiko 11-tą val. vakare, į 3 valandą po to, kaip dokumentas pasiekė senato spaustuvės.

Justicijos ministeris paliepė Kedriuskini sulaukyti atšakacijos spausdinimą, o 1-mą valandą nakties atvyko gats ir spereikalavo, kad jam būtų išdėmota organeliškoji atšakacijos kopija.

talkinėjus ant vakarų fronto, peiverčia Ameriką stipri daug dangiau karisimėnės, tegu to pirmiaus tikėtasi.

This translation filed with the postmaster at Chicago, Ill., on this day of May, 1918, as required by the act of October 3, 1917.

### RUMUNAI BELAISVIAI PRISIDEDA PRIE ITALŲ.

Paryžius, gegužio 3 d. — Attuociolika tolstacių kareivių, kurie tarnavo Austrijos armijoje, bet yra rumunų tautybės, pakliuvo italų nelaisvėn. Po to jie prašė, kad jiems būtų leista stoti frontan ir sykiu su italų armija kariauti prieš austrus. Italai sutiko ir pradėta šitą karisimę organizuoti. Rumunai nėra pirmi, kurie atsigrįžo atgal prieš Austriją ir perėjo talkinimų pusėn. Čechai tas su miešėta...

### Dienr

Anais laikais II pasaulė, kad ni vie ant 1-mo Apriliaus Paryžije, Prieš p tautiniskai pasakė, k Ruggjose jie turėsi dienraštį fai barant Hinderburgas. P matė, kiek savo ai klausimas, ar tautin tų savo dienraštį i Na, tai pažiserėda kint, kokį džiulą ji jeiga jie nemai tlei "Zallockis ant n "Itrundis en vaizeta ky." Naujo dienraščio

compromises. This partly explains the reluctance of the United States government to respond to letters and memoranda sent by the LAC. This uncertain situation further fueled the activity of the Lithuanian American leaders to gain United States support for Lithuania as soon as possible and thus to influence the other Entente countries (France, Great Britain, and Italy) to look more favorably on the LNC's aspirations to independence. On April 30 -May 3, an emergency LAC congress was held in Washington, D.C., to which editor Karolis Račkauskas Vairas, a representative of the Lithuanian American Nationalist Council (LANC), was also delegated. At the congress, it was noted that the silence of the Entente and the USA and the ignoring of the Lithuanian question were forcing European Lithuanians to "lean" towards Germany. Considering the situation in Lithuania, it was decided to make efforts to organize a large movement that would express its support for an independent and democratic Lithuania. The United States was to be the center of this movement. It also decided to send a delegate to Switzerland to influence the representatives of the LNC to speak out more in favor of the Entente. The Congress concluded that without a guarantee from the United States government that it would support Lithuanian statehood, it would not be possible to mobilize the Lithuanian population against the Germans [3]. To this end, the Congress decided to appeal directly to the President of the United States, on the grounds that there

were over 25,000 Lithuanians serving in the United States army, which was defending democracy in the war. The aim was to show the importance of the Lithuanian American community to the country.

### The Lithuanian American delegation at the White House

The diaspora leaders asked attorney Balys F. Mastauskas, who had connections in United States political circles, to arrange the meeting with the President. Initially, President Wilson was reluctant to receive the Lithuanians (on the grounds that he was ill, having burnt his hand) and on May 2nd, he referred them to George Creel, head of the Committee on Public Information. The Lithuanians suspected that the President's illness was "diplomatic", and that the President wanted to avoid receiving the delegation. But Mastauskas, as the participants recalled, did not give up. He used all his contacts in the capital to make sure that the delegation would not have to return home without seeing the President [4]. Balys Mastauskas himself met with George Creel, who also met with the entire Lithuanian delegation. After the meeting, he immediately addressed the President, recommending that the Lithuanians, as a group of people deserving of attention, be admitted to an audience [5]. The Lithuanians also paid a visit to William Phillips, the United States State Department official in charge of East-

ern European affairs. After listening to the Lithuanians' explanations, he expressed his approval and promised to speak to the President personally at once. As a result, on May 3rd, at 2:30 p.m., President Wilson, with his left hand bandaged, received the Lithuanian American delegation led by Mastauskas. The delegation consisted of 17 people, mainly members of the LAC. Among them was one LANC representative, Karolis Račkauskas-Vairas, and two women, A. Nausėdienė and Mary Kizis. George Creel and writer William Irwin were also present. The visit took 15 minutes [6].

The Memorandum was read in English by Father Jonas J. Jakaitis, who stressed that they represented almost one million Lithuanian Americans, loyal citizens of the United States and that more than 25,000 Lithuanian Americans were serving in the US Army, most of whom had volunteered for service. He noted that "for centuries, Lithuania has longed to be independent" and asked the President to recognize Lithuania's independence, ensure its territorial unity, and include Lithuania, like Poland, in the 14-point peace program [7]. Having listened to the Memorandum, President Wilson gave a short, but sympathetic, six-minute speech, expressing sympathy for the

cause and hopes of the Lithuanians. However, he did not make any clear promises in his speech, because, according to him, the wishes of the Lithuanians would depend on the victory of the Entente and that the situation of the Lithuanian nation and its situation would be considered. He did, however, hint that he would take care of Lithuanian affairs, entrusting them to professors to study them (such a commission was set up, and he appointed Dr. Frank A. Golder, professor of Eastern European history at Harvard University, as its chairman.) [8] One Lithuanian American, Dr. Matas Vinikas, assessing the President's speech, noted that the Americans had made it clear to the Lithuanian councils that the United States favor would be achieved only after the Lithuanian nation would get rid of all German influence, would fight the Germans, and would replace the present pro-German LNC with a new one favorable to the Allies [9]. Nevertheless, the very fact of the reception at the White House was seen by the Lithuanians as very positive, with a favorable outlook for the future. The liberal weekly Lithuanian American newspaper Lietuva, printed on the front page of its May 10th issue in large letters, "Wilson promises to support the Lithuanian Independence." [10]



What is next?

After the visit to the President, Lithuanian American political activity has seen an increase in anti-German propaganda. Lithuanian Americans tried to refute, and quite successfully, the alleged pro-German position of Lithuanian public figures. This required a strengthening of Lithuanian American information in Washington, DC. The final formation and functioning of the Executive Committee had to be resolved more quickly, and the Lithuanian Information Center, already operating in the capital, had to be expanded. A broad Memorandum on the question of Lithuanian independence had to be urgently drafted and delivered to all foreign embassies in Washington, DC. In addition, the Diaspora leaders decided to send a delegation of LAC and LANC representatives to Switzerland to persuade the European Lithuanian leaders to speak out more clearly against Germany and to inform the representatives of the Entente and the neutral coun-



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# LIETUVIAI PAS PREZIDENTĄ

**ATEILANKYMAS PAS PEEZ. WILSONĄ.**

Buvusių Valstijų prezidentas Wilson šiek tiek sutraukė lietuvių veiksmų audinimą, patysojį gegužės 3 d. po pietų. Delegacijai sudėję iš sekančių asmenų Amerikos Lietuvių Tarybos narių ir kitų veiksnių: Kan. J. J. Jakaitis iš Worcester, Mass.; Julius B. Kausas, Washington, D. C.; Jonas E. Karosas, Boston, Mass.; A. Mankusienė, Chicago, Ill.; V. K. Barkauskas, New York, N. Y.; A. Stankauskas iš Bloomfield, N. J.; kan. J. Stauglytis, Phila., Pa.; kan. C. Ornelis, Washington, D. C.; kan. M. C. Balchis, Dayton, Ohio; kan. J. Mikulskas, Wausau, Wis.; kan. F. Kovas, Chicago, Ill.; Leon. Samulis, Brooklyn, N. Y.; kan. R. Parkūsis, Wilkes-Barre, Pa.; kan. J. Kazimaitis, Pittston, Pa.; kan. J. Polakauskas, Boston, Mass.; Dr. J. J. Bielskis.

Kan. J. J. Jakaitis atstovauja prezidentui:

MR. PRESIDENT:

...which she would not, if she could, refuse her former executive position. She recalls the idea of a reorganization of the old personal union with Poland, and better obligations than Prussian domination. Independence and autonomy of alien influence, and those things for which she has declared and for which she strives.

You have probably stated, Mr. President, that "this war had its roots in the disregard of the rights of small nations and of nationalities which lacked the union and force to make good their claims, and you have declared that "covenants must now be entered into which will render such things impossible for the future" and those covenants must be backed by the united force of all the nations that love justice and are willing to maintain it at any cost."

The Lithuania of today possesses the union, but she still lacks the force, unaided and unassisted, to make good her claims. One of the

city guaranteed, cannot be unvindicated.

We respectfully ask your favorable consideration of our request, and we gladly accept our loyalty to, and our faith in the cause which you champion.

Peru Presidente:

Amerikos Lietuvių Taryba...  
London, geg. 5. — Estonijos Vyriausybės Tarybos delegacijai Anglijoje užsienio reikalų ministerei Balfourai inteliškai sususidomėjus, užrašė Estonijos politinio statuso ir padėties realiosios padėties ir aspiracijų. Balfour davė žiotų atklymą:

"Britanijos valdžia priimanči šveitina 20% tautos teisiškai ir yra galvota patvirtinti laukingą pripažinti Estonijos Vyriausybės Tarybos, kaip de facto nepripažintą, ir steigti iki karės pabaigos, kasmet galutinai. Tačiau šis likimas turės būti išspręstas sužymėjimo metu."

Per anksčiau Lietuvos teikioti norintuzimama. Per an-

**Anglija pripažino Estonijos Tarybą.**

The treaty was filed with the postmaster at Boston, Mass., on May 6, 1918, as required by the act of October 3, 1917.

**GALUTINAS STOVIS BUS IŠSIRIŠTAS PO KARO.**

London, geg. 5. — Estonijos Vyriausybės Tarybos delegacijai Anglijoje užsienio reikalų ministerei Balfourai inteliškai sususidomėjus, užrašė Estonijos politinio statuso ir padėties realiosios padėties ir aspiracijų. Balfour davė žiotų atklymą:

"Britanijos valdžia priimanči šveitina 20% tautos teisiškai ir yra galvota patvirtinti laukingą pripažinti Estonijos Vyriausybės Tarybos, kaip de facto nepripažintą, ir steigti iki karės pabaigos, kasmet galutinai. Tačiau šis likimas turės būti išspręstas sužymėjimo metu."

The treaty was filed with the postmaster at Boston, Mass., on May 6, 1918, as required by the act of October 3, 1917.

**FRASIDEDA APSIMAINYMAS MELAINIŲ.**

Moskva, bal. 27. — Greta prasidėjo mainymai melainių tarp Rusijos ir Vokietijos. Speciali komisija, tam reikalinga atvyko su valdžios ambasadorius Michach, kuris Va-

**Ofensyvas prieš Italiją.**

The treaty was filed with the postmaster at Boston, Mass., on May 6, 1918, as required by the act of October 3, 1917.

**NETRUKUS PRADESI OFENSYVĄ PRIES ITALIJĄ.**

Šiuo metu Italijos kariuomenė palei Piave upę ir dolomitus perėjo lapkričio mėnesį po peritrukusio nuo laisvės, prasidėjo bruzdėjimas ir bėgys leviškos dienos smagi skelbiamas, kadangi ofensyvas gali prasidėti.

Jau keturias savaites, kaip Italijoje laisvės ofensyvos ir Rusijos fronto, išsiaiškinti ofensyva prieš Italiją. Tė netolia 1918, jog jos vėliau netoli nuo laisvės, kasmet ten netoli prasidėjo naujos derybų pradžios priedėli Vengrijai, guma, perleisti tikintinai fronto ir pabūgti kokosine su Italija.

**ATVARIŠAVO IMPERATORIAUS**

Jei dar daugiau laisvės, tai turės būti į pietus per Šarazę ir kitas Prancūzijos provincijas. Nuo jai reikėtų ir atsiliepti, tai būtų sugręstas arba į karinį arka (neįvykusi). Štai kaip to dalykai apibūdinti Prancišiusas:

"Kaip žinote, stori dalykai, tai angliai laisvės 100 mylių ilgio fronto, o Italijai 15 mylių. Šitai visi frontai pajūzais penkis mėn. laisvės nuo juos per 40 mylių, o dalykai visais mėnesiais laisvės arčiau. Toliau būtų, jei reikėtų trauktis atgal, kaip tai reikėtų trauktis po savitaisio pradžios amžių prie St. Quentin, tai angliai atsimoty patįsiam pakmokyje.

Pirmas vakarinių tikslas, kasmet jis prasidėjo ofensyva, buvo tai susidominti Prancūzijos kariuomenės. Užsienio reikalų, sąjūti net nusidėjo patis kama-rijai dalykai būtų dalykai susidominti karis netaras laisvės ir va-

tries about the anti-German orientation of the Lithuanians and their desire to create their own independent state. It is true that all this required a lot of money. Thus, another important task was to collect as many donations as possible in the diaspora. The press wrote: "Compatriots! Without waiting for anything, organize Lithuanian Independence Foundation chapters in each community. Every member of the Foundation should pay a dollar (and those who are not able, at least half a dollar) or more every month (...). The fee would not have to be paid for long, just until the end of the war." [11] It should be noted that the diaspora, for patriotic reasons and out of sympathy for their old homeland, donated in large numbers. The donations were sufficient not only for the political activities of Lithuanians but also for the initial support of the needs of the Lithuanian state.

- <sup>1</sup> Kučas A. *Amerikos lietuvių istorija*. Boston, 1971, p. 356.
- <sup>1</sup> Lietuvių Audiencija pas Prezidentą. *Lietuva*. 1918, May 17, No. 20, p. 2.
- <sup>1</sup> Didžioji ir vieningoji JAV lietuvių veikla 1918 metais. Iš Leonardo Šimučio atsiminimų. *Draugas* (Trečioji dalis). 1968, February 17, No. 41, p. 2.
- <sup>1</sup> Kučas A. *Amerikos lietuvių istorija*. Boston, 1971, p. 356.
- <sup>1</sup> Lietuvių Audiencija pas Prezidentą. *Lietuva*. 1918, May 17, No. 20, p. 2.
- <sup>1</sup> Lietuviai pas Prezidentą. *Darbininkas*. 1918, May 7, No. 49, p. 1.
- <sup>1</sup> Liulevičius V. *Išėjimo vaidmuo nepriklausomos Lietuvos atkūrimo darbe*. Chicago, 1981, p. 150.
- <sup>1</sup> Skirius J. *JAV lietuvių darbai Lietuvai 1918-2018 metais*. Vilnius, 2018, p. 38.
- <sup>1</sup> *Lietuva*. 1918, May 10, No. 19, p. 1.
- <sup>1</sup> Musų šio momento svarbiausias reikalas... *Vienybė Lietuvninkų*. 1918, May 15, No. 20, p. 5.

<sup>1</sup> Amerikos spauda apie Lietuvą. *Draugas*. 1918, May 9, No. 110, p. 2.

# MEMBER OF NATO

Tony Mankus

## Chapter 3

### VSD

My first impression of her was that she had a calm demeanor; like she knew who she was and wasn't conflicted about it. I don't know why I reacted to her that way. Beneath her calm demeanor, though, I sensed a spark of energy; something in her eyes, maybe, or in the subtle hint of a smile.

"I'd like you to meet Rasa Gilytė," Harlan Salters turned to me by way of introduction. "Rasa is an agent with the Lithuanian State Security Department, known as the VSD. "Rasa, this is Jonas Dobis."

Rasa held out her hand and I took it.

"I have read about you, Jonas, in the dossier which was provided to me by Mr. Salters," she said. "I am very pleased to meet you in person."

My second reaction to her was that she was attractive, although not in a glamorous Hollywood way. Her makeup and clothing were modest and leaned more toward the professional.

"Labas," I responded to her with the Lithuanian word for 'hello.' "I look forward to working with you. Thank you for offering to help me on this matter of my father."

Rasa nodded. The corners of her lips turned up ever so slightly.

"Let's get to work," Salters continued. "I want to go over what we know so far."

Harlan Salters was an official at the U.S. Embassy in Vilnius. Doris Blanton had instructed me to contact him after I arrived in Lithuania. He had a mustache and a trimmed beard with a sprinkling of some gray hairs, although his ample and bushy hair on top was disheveled. He wore a striped dress shirt, but no jacket or tie.

The three of us sat down at a table in the conference room of the U.S. Embassy. Harlan took out some documents from his attaché case.

"I've had a chance to review the suspicious death of your father," Harlan turned to me. "It does appear that the Russian FSB was involved in it. Our intelligence sources tell us that the Russian FSB has been active here in the last few years. They have several agents assigned to the Russian embassy here, including Grigor Zavcek, a veteran FSB agent and former colonel in the Russian army."



"Officially," Rasa interjected, "Zavcek is registered as an 'economic attache' of the Russian Embassy in Vilnius, but we know this is not true. VSD is watching Mr. Zavcek very closely."

"Zavcek seems to have enough money in his budget to make things happen," Harlan continued, "including hiring -- or bribing -- local recruits. We think that your dad may have stumbled on to Zavcek, and/or some of Zavcek's minions, in his efforts to start a construction business here."

I nodded and continued to listen to Harlan.

"We don't have any concrete evidence yet to link him directly to your father's death, but we're working closely with Rasa and the Lithuanian VSD to continue with the investigation."

Rasa leaned forward at this point and spoke up again. "We have reconstructed a record of the activities of your father in the last three trips he made here," she said, "and we have prepared a dossier on the persons he met. Our records are not complete yet, but we can review them with you now."

The three of us walked from the American Embassy over to the headquarters of the VSD on Pilatė Avenue in Vilnius. On the way over, I asked Rasa what the acronym VSD stands for.

"Valstybės Saugumo Departamentas," she explained. "We are like your CIA and the FBI."

Rasa had a hint of an accent although her command of English was quite good, I thought.

We sat down in Rasa's office as she retrieved several sets of documents from her file cabinet. "It appears that your father wanted to start a construction business here and wished to connect with business investors. He asked his friend, Juozas Lauraitis, to help him. I believe you have met Mr. Lauraitis already?"

"Yes. We met at my dad's funeral."

"Mr. Lauraitis arranged a meeting with two people who are business investors," Rasa continued, "but the 'investors' your father and Lauraitis met are not inves-

tors; they are FSB agents who work with Zavcek.”

That didn't sound so good. “Can we trust Lauraitis?” I asked. “Maybe he's an FSB informant”.

“We are not sure about this,” Rasa answered. “We believe that he was misled, just like your father. However, we are still investigating the background of Mr. Lauraitis. The records of VSD before the independence of Lithuania in 1990 are gone. The Russians destroyed them, or took them back to Moscow when their military left in 1993.”

“I had planned to meet with Lauraitis once I got here,” I said. “I wanted to see if I could get more details about my father's plans and about his meeting with Lauraitis and with these ‘investors’ – FSB agents.”

“That is a good plan,” Rasa said, “but I believe that you should wait until we have discussed this further with you. I believe that we should make some plans before you meet with them.”

“I would concur with that,” Harlan added.

I nodded. “But tell me, Rasa, what information have you gathered about my dad's recent trips here?”

“We have gathered some curious things,” Rasa glanced at me.

“What do you mean?” I glanced back at Rasa

“One of those curious things is that your father went to see his first wife, your mother, many times.”

That WAS curious – and surprising. I went back into my memory bank. As I recalled, she and Dad separated when I was five. She went back to Lithuania, where she was born; I remained with Dad in Chicago. Dad got a divorce by publication thereafter in a local U.S. Court and secured my residential custody. To my limited knowledge and recollection of the events, Aistė didn't contest the divorce, or my custody. Even if she had wanted to take me with her to Lithuania, she probably realized that she would've lost the custody battle. I was born in the U.S. and she sort of abandoned me when she left the country.

Rasa and Harlan waited for me until focused back on the present.

“Were you able to find out why Dad went to see her?” I asked.

“Yes,” Rasa said. “We interviewed her several times.”

“What did she say?”

“Your mother said that she and your father met at the Vytautas Magnus University in Kaunas. She said that they were both students there. We were able to verify this with the University. However, many of the things your mother told us are of a personal nature.”

I wasn't sure how to respond to that. I glanced back at Rasa.

“I do not like to convey such personal information,” Rasa continued. “Perhaps it would be better that you hear them from your mother yourself. Would you go to Kaunas to see her?”

“I think that's a good idea,” Harlan interjected. “Rasa and I could go with you.”

I had mixed feelings about seeing my mom again after all those years, but I agreed. I wanted to find out what happened to my dad.

## Chapter 4

### Aistė

She appeared like a ghost from my childhood memories, somewhere in the deep recesses of my brain, from a quarter of a century ago, except that she was here suddenly, standing in front of me, as real as the world around me.

“You look wonderful, Jonas,” she greeted me with a warm and loving smile. “Thank you for agreeing to see me.”

My mother had aged, obviously, even if the glow of youth I remembered had faded into the mature woman now standing before me. Her full head of golden brown hair was now peppered with gray, but she still appeared strong and energetic. She reached out tentatively and took both of my hands in hers.

“I want you to know Jonas, that you are my son and that I love you with all my heart.

I wasn't sure of how to respond to this warm and personal greeting. I wasn't used to such an open show of affection and looked down momentarily.

“I also want you to know,” she went on, “that leaving you behind twenty six years ago was the most difficult and the most painful decision I have ever made in my life.”

Unless she were a world class actor, there was no denying her sincerity.

It's possible, I thought, that she may have been trying to allay some repressed feelings of guilt for having left me all those years ago, but I cautioned myself against jumping to any conclusions. For one thing, I never knew the full story of what happened twenty six years ago, or what the relationship had been between her and Dad. Dad and I never talked about it.

I looked up at my mother and our eyes met momentarily. She drew me gently closer to her and gave me a hug. I felt a slight shudder of a sob from her. My feet weren't super steady at that point, either.

“I hope we will have time to begin to fill the gaps of all those years,” I said, pulling back from the warm embrace. That's the only thing I could think of to say; it's the only thing that made any sense to me at the moment.

Rasa spoke up at that point and started the introductions. I'd almost forgotten about the other people in the room.

“Aistė, I am pleased to introduce you to Harlan Salt-

ers from the U.S. Embassy here in Vilnius; Harlan, please meet Professor Aistė Palionis -- the mother of Jonas," Rasa added with a smile.

"I am pleased to meet you Mr. Salters," Aistė brightened up as she turned to him. "Welcome to Kaunas. Everyone please make yourselves comfortable," she added.

Aistė guided us into what seemed like an office or a study room. I looked around as a young lady attendant, probably one of Aistė's students, I surmised, began taking our drink orders. It was a modest but comfortable place, I thought, decorated with what appeared to be handmade wooden furniture, mixed in with a smattering of 21st century accouterments like computers, multi-function printers/scanners, telephones, etc. Along one side of the wall stood a multi-tiered bookshelf filled with books, interspersed with framed pictures and other small mementos, including some from VMU, the Vytautas Magnus University. I assumed that she was probably a professor there.

"This almost feels like we're breaking into to a family reunion," Harlan began after everyone had settled down in their chairs around Aistė's desk. "I apologize for the intrusion, Ms. Palionis. However, there is an 'official' reason for our visit today," he added.

"Please call me Aistė," she said. "Rasa briefed me about the purpose of your visit here and I am ready, as you say in English, to be deposed," she added, with an emphasis and a smile at the word "deposed."

"Thank you, Aistė," Harlan responded with a smile. "We will not depose you, but I'll get right to the point. We want to know why Peter Dobis, your ex-husband, came to see you a number of times during his trips to Lithuania."

"He said he wished to start a construction business here," Aistė responded openly, "and he wanted me to help him set it up and to run it."

"I'm sorry to interrupt this topic," Rasa interjected, "but before we discuss the plans of Peter for a construction business here, I would like to ask you first, Aistė, if Peter ever talked to you about Karaliaučius Šeimų Draugija?"

Aistė hesitated momentarily. "Yes he did," she finally answered.

"What is that organization?" Harlan asked.

"It is an organization of the families which had lived in Karaliaučius," Rasa explained. "It is now called Kaliningrad."

Harlan nodded and continued to listen.

"Many Lithuanian families had established their lives there over the years," Rasa added. "The Lithuanian name for the place was Karaliaučius, also known as 'Lithuania Minor.'"

"That is correct," Aistė warmed up to the topic. "We formed this organization ten years ago. We wished to commemorate and celebrate our cultural and political

heritage in Karaliaučius."

"I believe, Aistė, that your family had deep roots in Karaliaučius," Rasa added.

"Yes, my father's side of the family had been there for almost two hundred years and owned a large estate there. The Russians expropriated our land illegally."

"Now I know what you're talking about," Harlan brightened up with recognition. "Kaliningrad is an 'oblast' -- as the Russians call it -- and it adjoins Lithuania on its southwest border, along the Eastern shore of the Baltic Sea."

"That is correct," Rasa nodded in agreement.

"But if I remember my history correctly," Harlan added, "I believe that Kaliningrad was previously known as Königsberg and that it was voluntarily ceded to the Russians by the Allied powers after WWII, as part of the Potsdam Declaration."

Aistė stiffened visibly in her seat. "With all due respect, Mr. Salters," she interjected, "the Potsdam Conference declared that the Königsberg territory would be administered temporarily by the Soviet Union, until the negotiations of a Peace Treaty that was foreseen at the end of the war. That was agreed to by Stalin himself -- in writing. However, Stalin never agreed to hold any such peace discussions after the war ended. His military troops were there already and he did not see a need for any such treaty."

It wasn't hard to surmise that this was a deeply personal subject for my mother.

"And I wish to make it clear," Aistė continued, "that Russia had no historical connection to Karaliaučius before WWII. After the war, it was taken over by the Russian Communists who expelled everyone that had not already fled during the violence of WWII. They repopulated Karaliaučius with only Russian nationals. Those of us who had lived there before the war were forbidden to return."

Harlan nodded and resumed the questioning. "So what did you and Peter talk about regarding this organization? What's it called again?"

It is called the Karaliaučius Šeimų Draugija?" Rasa answered.

"I'll just call it the 'KSD,'" Harlan smiled. "It's too hard to pronounce."

"Peter offered to make voluntary contributions to the organization," Aistė continued, "and to help me support it in any way he could. The one condition was that I would help him to start it and to help him run his construction business here."

"How did you respond to that?" Harlan asked.

"I responded to him that I would think about it."

"I would imagine," Harlan observed, "that the Russians aren't too happy about KSD. It threatens their sovereignty over Kaliningrad -- even if KSD is a small organization."

"It is not so small," Aistė asserted. "We have more than three thousand members now -- not only Lithuanians like myself, but Prussian Germans, Poles, as well as other nationals whose families had resided there and lost their land and property to the brutal and heartless Communists."

Aistė's face was flushed and her eyes ablaze. Her passion and anger were evident. I wanted to know more about who this woman, my mother, was.

"Our information is that the Russians are aware of KSD," Rasa stated, "and are keeping a close watch on it."

"They are keeping more than a close watch on it," Aistė added. "In the last few years I have had unmarked cars following me on my trips to and from VMU. I also receive repeated telephone calls in the middle of the night. When I answer, it is always the same. There is a momentary silence and then the calls are ended."

"Grigor Zavcek and the FSB must have known that you were meeting with Peter," Harlan observed.

At least we were starting to make some progress on my father's involvements in this convoluted scenario, I thought.

Aistė called for a break to the meeting around noon and invited everyone to the dining room. She invited me to sit next to her as the student attendants brought in lunch. Traditional Lithuanian dishes were served, including šaltibarščiai, cold beet soup, Kotletai, chopped meat patties, Kugelis, a baked potato pudding, and Cepelinai, potato dumplings stuffed with ground meat, topped with bacon chips and sour cream.

Needless to say, this sumptuous, rib-sticking meal was delicious, but way over my capacity to consume even a fraction of what was offered. I indulged in at least a part of the fare, but enjoyed it very much, especially since I had an opportunity to chat with my mother on a more personal level.

"Your dad and I fell in love with each other when we first met as students at the VMU," she told me. "We agreed that we would be married after graduation and that we would apply for an immigrant Visa to America. The economic conditions in Lithuania were terrible right after Lithuania regained its independence from the Soviet Union. We felt that our chances to build a better future for ourselves and for any of our children would be in America."

As we chatted, I glanced momentarily at Rasa. She turned slightly to acknowledge my glance, but returned her focus quickly to the conversation she was having with Harlan.

"After we were granted our residency visas in 1991," Aistė continued, "your father and I decided to move to Chicago which already had a large Lithuanian community. You were born there the year after. Unfortunately, Peter and I started to drift apart after we emigrated to

America. Things were never the same after he was hired to work at the construction company of Colleen's father. Besides working long hours, I found out that he was seeing Colleen after she was divorced from her first husband. I became the odd person in that circle."

That part, about Dad seeing Colleen while he was married to Aistė, was news to me. I was too young at the time to see what was going on. But if it was true, it certainly added another complicated wrinkle to my family's dynamics.

"Your father was ambitious and wanted to succeed in America," Aistė continued. "I think that he saw an opportunity in his relationship to Colleen to take over her father's construction business. I held on for a while. I did not want the marriage to end this way, but the situation became unbearable. I returned to Lithuania to live with my mother, your grandmother. I was deeply hurt about our marriage and about losing you, but I had to move on. I enrolled in a graduate program at VMU, and focused all of my emotional energy on earning a PhD in East European history. I wanted to build a life for myself in Lithuania now that it was finally rid of the cruel and heartless Russians."

That kind of made sense to me; and I guess that I had managed to survive the family turmoil and to make something of myself as well – thanks to my dad and to Colleen, ironically. Life is complicated, I decided.

"Unfortunately, you were the emotional victim in this situation," Aistė added. She looked at me as her eyes glistened with a hint of tears. "It hurt me deeply to leave you behind when I came back to Lithuania, but I did not know what else I could have done."

I reached out and took her hand briefly in mine. "I'm so sorry about how things turned out for you," I said. "I can certainly see how much it hurt you. But here's the curious thing for me: since your marriage with Dad had collapsed so painfully, why did Dad seek you out after all those years?"

"To be honest with you, I am not sure," Aistė responded. "Maybe your father regretted breaking up our marriage, or maybe he still loved me. I do not know. I know he still loved Lithuania. Now that we were rid of the Russian occupation, I think that he wanted to come back here to start a business. Maybe he wanted, as I did, to help Lithuania to develop economically."

I nodded.

"But what about you?" Aistė asked, turning to me with a look of concern. She seemed genuinely interested to know more about me. "I'm so glad to see that you are well. You are still not married?"

"I had a committed relationship for several years, but it fell apart."

"Life is complicated," Aistė said. She expressed what I felt deeply and sadly inside of me.



# Lithuanians in Colorado Celebrated Lithuania's Independence

*Aura Juškevičienė*

Members of the Lithuanian American Community in Colorado celebrated the birthday of the Lithuanian state restored 105 years ago and its independence restored 33 years ago with folk dances, songs, congratulatory remarks, and a tricolor-decorated cake.

February 16th and March 11th are two of the most significant dates of the Lithuanian state, reminding us of the cost of our freedom. The desire to live in a free and strong state requires a lot of effort from each of us, including unity among family, friends, and community members. Participation in cultural gatherings such as the Independence Day celebrations unites Lithuanians living in Lithuania and around the world.

It was a great pleasure to share the sense of community that binds Lithuanians together with Ukraine, which is going through a painful war. Marina Dubrova, the President of the Ukrainian Community in Colorado, came to congratulate the Lithuanians on its Freedom Day. The participants donated funds and wished good health to the soldiers fighting for Ukraine.

The Lithuanians of Colorado are lucky to have creative and artistic community members. The United States and Lithu-



anian national anthems were sung to the accompaniment of a trumpeter Donatas Juodzevičius. Community member Rimas Bulota read a prayer written by himself. The Colorado Lithuanian School congratulated the Community on the occasion of Independence Day. This year, the school celebrates its fifth anniversary. Warm applause accompanied the cheerful polkas danced by the youngest and oldest students. The dances performed by the Rūta dance group were bursting with energy and created a cheerful atmosphere reminding everyone of the 16th North American Folk Dance Festival in Philadelphia last summer.

Musician and songwriter Romualdas Zableckas, known to many by his stage name Colorado Romas, celebrated 40 years on the music scene this year. He sang several songs from his last year's album, *Akmeninis Sodas* (Stone Garden).

During the celebration evening, we thanked the many volunteers who danced, sang, played, hosted events, helped decorate the halls, wrote lyrics, and contributed in any way they could to make sure that Lithuanian get-togethers in Colorado are a success.

The Independence Day celebration was crowned with a welcome by the new Colorado LAC Board and a cake decorated with a bright tricolor, marking 105 years of Lithuania.



# our community



Donatas Juodzevičius, Daiva Kamberos, Kristina Vyšniauskienė, and Arvidas Jarašius will be in charge of the activities of the Colorado Lithuanian American Community for the next two years.

The second part of the event included a concert by Irena Starošaitė, a musician from Lithuania. There were great songs and even line dances to accompany them. This is a special year for Lithuania. It is celebrating 105 years since the restoration of the Lithuanian State, the 700th birthday of Vilnius, the 90th anniversary of the flight across the Atlantic by our heroes, Steponas Darius and Stasys Girėnas, and the 100th anniversary since Klaipėda was annexed to Lithuania. We celebrate freedom and appreciate and cherish it. Let us be united, let us be communal, and let us love each other. Let us love Lithuania, let us love the country we live in, where we were born, and where we grew up.



Photos by Kristina Vyšniauskienė

## Children and Easter Eggs Crowned on the Second Sunday of Easter in Colorado

*Kornelija Viečaitė,  
a teacher at Colorado Lithuanian School*



A week after Easter, on April 15th, Lithuania celebrated the Second Sunday of Easter. It is also known as Children's Easter. The Colorado Lithuanian School organized a celebration for all Lithuanian children in Colorado, during which they played games, rolled Easter eggs, and enjoyed refreshments. As the weather in Colorado was sunny on the first weekend after Easter, the Colorado Lithuanian School community decided to celebrate outdoors.

Everyone in the school community, big and small, worked together to decorate the Big Margutis using organic materials such as pine cones, spruce twigs, dried petals, nut shells, and other nature's bounty. The result was a spring-like and nature-friendly symbol of Easter. After decorating the Easter Egg, the children played games, during which they became bunnies, wizards, and eggs.

The highlight of the afternoon was the Easter Egg Roll. Children competed to see whose egg would roll the furthest, and the celebration culminated in a hunt for hidden Easter eggs in the meadow. The four champions were crowned with spring-colored crowns. But it wasn't just the children who were awarded crowns. The decorated Easter eggs were also nominated in a competition, winning titles such as "the most hard-working," "the most mysterious," "the most colorful," "the most cheerful," and others.

The children left the party carrying baskets full of candy and Easter eggs. They have also strengthened their Lithuanian spirit because the more time we spend together, the stronger the bond between Lithuanians and our homeland Lithuania.

our community



# UNEXPECTED JOURNEY

## Memoir of a Siberian Deportee

By Juzė Avižienytė Žukauskienė  
Translated from the Lithuanian by  
Giedrė Kumpikas, Ph.D., niece of the  
author, and Isabel Kumpikas, sister of  
the author

### 68. ARRESTS

Here it was, the year 1946. Five years of slavery had passed. We had withstood, had endured starvation and illnesses, and all sorts of injustices. And once again, with new energy, we were clutching at life. But...

The arrests began. First, they arrested the former “Food” director, Tallat-Kelpša, and his son, Stasys. No news, no visits. What their fate was, no one knows. Only his wife, another son and a daughter remained at liberty. After some time, they also arrested the former Colonel Jakštas.

Shortly after that a woman named Kristina who had returned from Parbig came running over to me. “Och, Natasha, they’ve taken your old man.”

I did not become too frightened since I could not believe that my husband had been arrested. What could he have done? But, nevertheless, I ran to Parbig to find out if it were true. It was apparently true. I went to inquire at the militia.

“We do not know anything. Ask the security chief.”

I go to the security chief. He does not receive me and will not speak to me.

The deportees are worried. They bestir themselves. One did not have to commit any offense. An accusation could be fabricated, whatever type they wanted. A new security institution—MGB (Ministerstvo Gosudarstvennoi Bezopasnosti—The Ministry of National Security)—was established where we were only after the war and which had its own agenda. Before, there had only been the commandant, the militia, and the prosecutor, but now there also



appeared this MGB section. I went to my husband's workplace. There also no one could tell me anything, only one komsomolka\* uttered anything: "Don't let him blab too much!"

About that blabbing and, in general, about the reason for the arrest I found out only much later. At the militia, they told me that on Saturdays one could bring some food.

On Saturday, I prepared a little package. Liudukas added some of his saved-up rations, and, even though he was hungry himself, a half loaf of bread. Deliveries were accepted from 7 p.m. I went to the waiting room. There was quite a little group of people. The militiaman began to accept the deliveries. My turn came up at last. "To whom shall I give this?"

"To Žukauskas."

"Do you have a permit?"

"Is a permit necessary? It looks as if everyone is just handing packages over without a permit."

"Those are just ordinary arrests, but for Žukauskas, we have orders not to deliver anything without a separate permit from the security chief."

I become frightened, upset. I go to look for that chief. The office is locked. The chief only works until 6 p.m. but receives callers only between 2 and 4 p.m. three days a week, which includes Saturday.

I returned very distraught, worried. I went to Liudukas. He did not have a day off on the following day, Sunday, and could not come to Melstroy. I gave him back his bread and what I had brought from home. He embraced me, clasped me to his chest, and began to cry. My breast was also not made of stone. We both cried. We parted and I walked out into the cold night. At Melstroy, two more anxious sons awaited me.

Knowing the regulations, the following Saturday I went early, got permission to deliver food, and in return received back the dishes (a milk bottle and a small bowl) in which I had brought some porridge. I also received in addition soiled clothing to launder.

At this point, we were not particularly hungry or tattered. Permits to receive packages from Lithuania were issued to us by the administrative offices without difficulties, and my good sister Slavėniene would put together packages not only from her reserves, but also from things donated to her by relatives and friends. Having surmounted all the administrative obstacles, she would send them to us. We also received money transfers.

One Saturday, having brought my delivery, I met the cleaning lady of the militia.

She motioned to me mysteriously and looking around to see if anyone was not watching, pulled me into the admission room on the yard side, grabbed me by the

elbow and began whispering:

"Oh, oh! Your old man the night before last - I was on duty - they dragged him out dead from the supervisor's office. There was only blood in the corners of his mouth.... They threw him out onto the snow..."

I almost fell over; my legs were buckling under me; my bundle fell out of my shaking hands.

"Don't be afraid, he recovered and kept spitting blood onto the snow." The woman was calming me. Oh, dear God! Give me patience; give me strength!

I go to the supervisor for permission to deliver the food.

"Wait, we have to talk."

I wait anxiously. After a few seconds, a question:

"What was your husband?"

"When I met him the first time, he was an officer. Later, after he retired, he was an office employee, and lately, due to his health, he did not work anywhere; he was only a co-worker on a newspaper and radio.

"Co-worker" - jumped up Koniev (such was the superior's name).

"Write it down!" he orders the secretary.

In the MGB's understanding, a "co-worker" - "sotrudnik" - means a secret security agent, a spy.

"To which Party did he belong?"

"To none. In Lithuania, it was forbidden for officers to belong to any political group," I answered firmly, confidently, because my husband really did not belong to any Party.

"Well, why are you saying an untruth?" he himself confessed that he was a member of the Fascist Party."

"Well, here, forgive me, but it is quote absurd! In Lithuania there was no such Party. If he admitted such a thing, I wonder by what means you could have forced a person to say such nonsense."

I held firm because I knew that my husband, even if tortured and half-conscious could not have said that which was not so.

The superior tried another trick.

"In his name, we have a postal money transfer for 5000 Rubles. You could buy a cow. Convince your husband to confess and we will give the money to you."

"How will I talk him into it when I have not even seen him in three months, and you do not always permit food deliveries. Besides, how can I propose to a moral person that he tell a lie?"

"We will give you a permit to see him if you really promise to extract a confession from him."

"I will be truly grateful for a permit to see him, but you will definitely not get a confession. Not even for me, not even for 5000 Rubles, he will not lie. Besides, you said that you have already received such a confession."

"Get out! There will be no permit for a visit."

I understood that these were clever snares. If I had just said that I would try to obtain such a confession, it is obvious, they would have immediately written it down as a fact that I knew that my husband really was a “fascist” Party member. Clearly, there would have been no need for a visitor permit, nor would they have given one.

I stopped by the post office to inquire if there had been a money transfer or package for any member of my family. They looked and checked. “No, there was nothing.” Then I said concretely that I was told that there was a 5000 Ruble money transfer in my husband’s name.

“No, there isn’t and there wasn’t. We would really remember a sum like that.”

Ah, hah! So, they also wanted to catch my husband on that hook for a false confession, so that his family could get 5000 rubles and be able to buy a cow.

But they did not succeed. Then, they beat him up till he was unconscious and dragged him out onto the snow to recover.

The following Saturday, I brought food and laundered clothing, warm underwear, and a sweater. I need a permit.

“The chief is busy” says the man on duty.

“I will wait!” I hear several voices behind the office door.

“Don’t stand there! It’s forbidden.” – a strict order from the man on duty.

Leaning close against the wall I wait an hour, I wait two, I wait three, and the chief is still busy. Seven o’clock, everyone had given their bundles, all were accepted, but no one wanted to speak to me. There was movement on two floors. Militiamen were running from one office to another. I hear someone saying something.

“What about these three? They have no pymy?”

I did not hear the answer, but a pain went right through my heart, that they were preparing a march, to drive the convicts to Tomsk. Would my husband fall into that group?

“What are you standing here for? The chief is busy. We will accept no more deliveries today,” said the rough voice of the guard.

I leave crushed, sad. Liudukas is standing watch at his house. I stopped by, left my bundle and went out into the frightful, dark Siberian night. The cold was not the cruelest. The thermometer by the militia guardhouse showed only -35C, but the wind was very sharp. I turned into the main road. Terrible blizzard. The wind was howling through the telephone lines. The road was covered. Even the tracks were not visible, not only the tracks, but it was difficult even to follow the main road. I constantly slide onto the shoulder; I dive up to my armpits into the drifts. My face, my hands are freezing, but my back is perspiring. I lost my strength completely and still I could not see the turn to Melstroy. I clomp and

clomp through those whirlwinds of snow. My forces are at an end. I feel like collapsing into the soft snow, falling asleep and never waking up.

Gathering my last strength, I still struggle forward. And...Luck! Before my eyes I see a little flickering light! I stopped. I thought, perhaps it is a hallucination? No. It really is a flickering light and not just one. No, now I will definitely reach home! And I did.

This trip of mine to the Parbig jail (KPZ) was the last one. The next day, by the same snow-covered road, they drove my husband with other prisoners in stages to Tomsk.

The prisoners go on foot. The cold does not even go below -40C. That is considered not too cold. But my husband left half-naked, cotton pants, a little jacket, a not very warm coat. Why did those beasts not allow me to give him some warmer clothing?

\*komsomolka - member from the Young Communists’ Organization

\* pymy – felt boots

\* -40 Celsius is equal to -40 Fahrenheit

## 69. ONE MORE SHOCK

We succeeded in buying 2 kg of wool. We were very happy that we would have one more pair of felt-boots. Stasiukas and I wouldn’t have to share one pair.

In the morning while Stasiukas went with the workers to fell trees, I went to Parbig to card the wool. I was sitting by the machine and I was throwing pinches of wool onto the transporter. The machine was sounding rhythmically; it was not cold on the premises. I began to daydream. Suddenly I felt that there was someone standing behind my chair. I turned around to look. Tomkevičius from Melstroy standing there. He was squeezing his gloves in his hands, looked as if he wanted to say something, but he only coughed and was silent.

“Did you come to the mill, Oliuk,” I asked.

“No, I brought Stasys,” said Olius rather timidly.

“What?”

“Don’t you become too frightened. He’s still able to talk?” stuttered the young man, “still able.”

Lord! What had happened that he had to be brought back? What does it mean to say, “He’s able to talk”? I wanted to stand up. I wanted to ask where he was, but I felt as if my back were broken. My legs felt like cotton, I was speechless. Tomkevičius helped me get up.

“Let’s go. I am here with a horse. I’ll drive you to the hospital.” He helped me walk to the sled and drove me to the hospital. The cold air sobered me up somewhat.

As I walked into the hospital, I was met by a nurse who

told me that my son was in the bath and that they were taking care of him. I could not see him then. Shortly thereafter they brought Stasiukas out on a stretcher. He was pale. His eyes were closed. I went up to him.

“My son, does it hurt very much?”

His eyes fluttered a little. He half-smiled and whispered:

“It’s nothing.”

The orderlies carried him immediately to a ward, and they gave me his clothes.

I stood there neither alive nor dead. I couldn’t even comprehend what those clothes were for. The doctor’s voice brought me out of my stupor:

“Why are you giving away his clothes? What will he wear when we release him?”

Upon hearing the wrathful voice directed at the orderly, my head cleared, and I said:

“Doctor, those clothes are soaked through from the snow and the underwear from sweat. I’ll wash them and bring them back quickly. Only release him alive.”

She waived me away with her hand and walked off to the ward.

Having regained my full senses and strength, I flew like the wind to Doctor Šakenienė. She was not at the hospital at that time, but I found her in her room, sitting with a guest, Aleksienė, from far-off Svietlo-Zelionoe. They were chatting gaily and were sipping tea. Šakenienė, as usual, exclaimed pleasantly, “Oh, how nice, Žukauskiene! Sit down! We’ll drink some tea right away.”

I could barely keep from crying, I only said that a tree had struck Stasiukas. He was in the hospital and he needed her immediate help, that is Šakenienė’s. The doctor, dropping everything and ran off to the hospital as I followed after.

In the hospital, Dr. Šakenienė darted past me already wearing her white coat, and the door closed. I was numb, my nerves on edge as I waited for her to return and wondered what she would say. It seemed to me that I waited a very long time, that Stasiukas had perhaps already died and that they were only delaying telling me. Once again all my strength abandoned me. Tomkevičius, who came up, asked me to bring the horse back to Melstroy since he planned to stay with his in-laws. I sobered up again and noticed that it had become dark and before me once again lay a trip back to Melstroy. I thanked him and promised to lead the horse back to where it belonged.

Finally, Šakenienė came out and said, “Don’t worry. Everything will be fine. We set his broken ribs. The crack on his head is not dangerous. The brain is not affected.”

I collapsed again: broken ribs, a cracked head!

“Don’t worry. There’s no danger. I myself poked around that hole with a pincer. Everything is fine. You can see him, only not for long. And don’t ask him to talk.

He needs rest.”

I went into the ward. Stasiukas was lying on his back, pale with pearls of tears flowing from his eyes.

“Stasiuli,\* does it hurt a lot? The doctor says that you’ll be well soon, that there is no great danger.” I was calming him and with all my strength trying to hold back my tears.

“Mommy, I would really like some hot, very hot, tea.”

The hospital kitchen was no longer working. I ran to Mrs. Jasinskienė. She lived there with Genė Snarskiene (Liudas’ fictitious wife). They immediately lit a fire, boiled some water for tea and, having heated an earthenware bowl, wrapped it in some rags, brought it to Stasiukas.

I climbed into the sled and drove off to Melstroy.

In the morning, while it was barely light, the worker Jablonskis came over. “How’s Stasys?” he asked crumpling his hat.

“He looks bad, but Šakenienė is taking care of him.”

“If only he survives.” And he wiped his tears.

“But how did it happen? He’s not a newcomer in the forest, yet he was caught under a tree?”

“How did it happen? We were felling trees. One tree, as it was falling, got caught on a two-branch birch. What to do? We let down another tree across the one that was stuck. But it didn’t knock the other one down. We let down another one. That one got stuck too. I then shouted over to Stasys, who was working further away, and I said, “You are the team leader. What should we do?”

“And he, saying nothing, stuck an ax under his belt and immediately clambered up the leaning tree to the top of the birch tree. He probably thought that he would cut loose the ones that were stuck, then wait until they fell and climb down the birch.

“He struck with the ax. The blow was strong, the cold bitter, the tree brittle. The top broke immediately. But a branch caught Stasys and threw him down. And he clattered down with that whole bunch of trees. We were extremely frightened. At first we were even afraid to pull him out. We thought—he’s finished! But then we managed to turn over the trees and pull him out. He lay there for a while, then said, “Where is my ax? I probably won’t work anymore today.”

“But he could not even stand up by himself. Tomkevičius ran to bring the horse while all of us stopped working. Stasys asked us to pull down his pants. I helped. He was bleeding profusely. The flood was even more visible on the snow. Probably his intestines were mashed.”

While the middle-aged man was narrating, he constantly kept wiping away tears. For that reason the others made fun of him later. They said he wanted a shot of alcohol, and that’s why he was crying. What strange things happen in life!



Almost no one believed that Stasiukas would recover. I called the hospital every day. Every second day, I went to visit him. He was improving quickly. After two weeks, I brought him home, but he got a medical excuse for two more weeks.

“And in misfortune there is some luck,” said Stasiukas, “When I was cutting, I hit against the stump with my side and fell next to it. The tree with its entire trunk, hit against the stump. A second later, it slid down the other side of the stump. If it hadn’t been for the stump, I’d probably be buried now.” I had to agree, that he had been lucky.

Stasiuli – another diminutive version of Stasys.

## 70. SOMETHING GOOD ALWAYS COMES OUT OF SOMETHING BAD

After two weeks, the doctors examined Stasiukas and gave him a written certificate that he could not do any strenuous physical work.

That was fine. He would have neither to carry heavy sacks nor to fell trees in the forest. By order of the director he was transferred to the office. After a few weeks, Stasiukas was appointed operative bookkeeper. He was given ciphers to learn. He was a smart boy, and he caught on very quickly to those codes. I don’t know why, but the Bolsheviks were afraid of everything, and so everything was encoded to keep things secret. Actually I do know why: it is understandable, where there is interrogation, where there is much lying, much coercion, much provocation—all that could not be brought out into the open. But why was it a secret how much bread a country receives? Why was it a secret how much grain each collective farm gives over to the government? After all, the plan is given out beforehand. And yet, every five days coded reports had to be made. They were sent to the regional office only in coded telegrams. And the delivery of those coded telegrams to the post office was entrusted only to the operative bookkeeper. And that is how the whole region’s bread funds wound up at Stasiukas’ disposal. He is the only one who could code and decode the ciphers. So that the telegraph would not make a mistake, every fifth day he himself would have to bring a whole sheet consisting only of numbers to the telegraph office and sit and dictate the text to the telegraph operator. The original was returned to the station. The post office only gave a receipt.

Stasiukas would sometimes laugh that he had to be called in by the director every time he received a coded telegram since he was never able to decipher it himself: “Stasik, rastolkuy ka mne etu chertovshchinu.” (Stasiuk, explain this devil script to me).

And so my two sons were both sitting in warm quarters with stable, routine jobs and steady income.

Although after the icy bath something was still wrong with Liudas’ lungs and Stasiukas’ damaged bones had weakened his strength, Juozukas had passed into the fifth grade of a full ten-grade school. He did not even have to go into the forest with the others to prepare firewood for the school. There all sorts of things occurred. A young girl, Juozapaitytė, had also been struck by a falling tree. She and another girl were cutting down a tree at quite a distance from another pair, as it seemed to them. Only those two, seeing that the tree was falling in the direction of Juozapaitytė and the girl with her, succeeded in shouting, “Watch out!” One other girl managed to run out of the way, but the top of the falling tree struck Juozapaitytė on the head. She was brought unconscious to the hospital at Parbig, and from there they hurriedly sent her by plane to Tomsk. She did not die. But because of the concussion, she lost her memory and remained simple. She could not study. And such a beautiful sixteen-year old girl!

That’s how it is! People are egotists: I was happy that my children were farther away from dangers. The reason Juozukas did not have to go into the forest was his social activities. The school was editing a wall-hung newsletter. This came about when an editorial group was being put together, and his classmates proposed him as a candidate. He was a newcomer to this school and was not known. For this reason, the chairman asked who he was and why his candidacy was being submitted. One girl jumped up and excitedly said, “Oh! He’s a great artist! He just draws and draws.”

“He’ll decorate the whole newspaper,” added the other students.

“Well, if he’s such a great artist, then why not elect him to the editorial staff,” said the chairman unable to hold back a smile.

But everyone took him seriously and immediately voted for him to be on the staff. And so, on Sundays when other students were assigned to physical work—in the forest, at collective assistance work, at putting things in order—Juozukas got an assignment to draw for the newspaper, make slogans for posters, create educational pictures, and so on.

We were no longer hungry. We were clothed. We had shoes. The work was according to our strength, but we were still oppressed by a feeling of uncertainty. Would we, after all, remain in this Siberian swamp? The family had scattered. We had lost our father. Juozukas was with Liudas. Even though they were not far away, still we were not together. Only Stasiukas and I were at Melstroy.

# Juozas Statkevicius Fashion Show in Chicago

April 15, 2023



Photos by Giedre Gomes.

## Security

In Warsaw, President Joe Biden met with leaders of NATO's eastern flank, the Bucharest Nine (B9) to discuss Ukraine, regional security, and the upcoming July 11-12 meeting of NATO in Vilnius. Founded in November 2014 following the Russian annexation of Crimea and aggression in eastern Ukraine, the B9 are former members of the Soviet Union or the Warsaw Pact. It includes Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania and Slovakia.

Lithuanian President Gitanas Nausėda urged NATO's deployment of airspace surveillance systems, attack helicopters, and HIMARS artillery. "We can hardly afford to purchase this, but it could be deployed (by allies) to the Baltics on rotational grounds," he said. Although not a current member of NATO, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskiy plans to attend the summit.

Lithuania is participating in NATO joint maneuvers at a military base in Bavaria Germany. Other participants include forces from Germany, Poland, Romania, and the United Kingdom. Brigadier General Artūras Radvilas, commander of Lithuania's Land Force said that staff included commanders of the army, air force, and field medical service units.

Since August 3, 2021, the Lithuanian Border Guard Service were given the right to turn away irregular migrants. A total of 19,700 people has been repelled from entering from Belarus. The number includes repeated attempts by the same person.

The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) meeting in Vienna was boycotted by Ukraine and Lithuania because Austria allowed the Russian delegation to attend. The Russians are under European Union sanctions, and 20 countries had protested, including Britain, France, and Canada. According to Austria's Foreign Ministry, as the official seat of the OSCE, Austria is obliged under international law to issue visas to all delegations.

President Nausėda's National Security Advisor Kęstutis Budrys said that Russia's mercenary group, Wagner, may be involved with provocations in the Baltic countries. It has involvement in Ukraine, Burkina Faso, the Central African Republic, and Mali.

Lithuania's Defense Ministry and Israel's National Cyber Directorate signed an agreement to provide bilateral

consultations and cooperation to strengthen the resilience of each country's critical infrastructure.

Svetlana Tikhanovskaya, the exiled Belarusian opposition leader residing in Lithuania, was sentenced in absentia by a court in Minsk to 15 years in prison for treason and a conspiracy to seize power.

The Seimas Committee on National Security and Defense (NSDC) confirmed that the Klaipėda Port Authority denied entry to a Russian-owned but Belizean-flagged ship, the dredger Bystrays because it is subject to sanctions. Instead, it diverted to a port in Russia's Kaliningrad.

The NSDC proposed that Russian citizens and companies owned by them be banned from owning real estate in Lithuania. There has been an increase in the number of Russians coming to Lithuania since Russia launched its invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022, and its military mobilization in October.

The Defense Ministry's Annual National Security Threat Assessment claims that during a scheduled shutdown of the Astravyets Nuclear Power Plant, certain incidents and defects were not reported according to Lithuania's State Security Department and Second Investigations Department.

Lithuania's Žemaitija Infantry Brigade held joint exercises with the French Air Force's Rafale fighter jets on and over the Curonian Spit. The Rafale is made by Dassault Aviation of France. It is a twin-engine, canard delta wing that has been in combat over Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, Mali, and Syria.



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Around 150 members of the Portuguese Marine Corps will train with the Žemaitija Infantry Brigade, the Special Ops Forces, and Lithuanian Navy. The rotational force will train in Kairiai and include live-fire exercises, infiltration, and exfiltration by combat boats. Kairiai is located in north central Lithuania between Šiauliai and Panevėžys.

### Ukraine

Lithuania has begun deliveries of 36 L-70 anti-aircraft guns and ammunition, which are especially effective against Iranian-made Shahed unmanned aerial vehicles (drones). The drones are powered by a single-engine pusher propeller with a speed of 150 km/hr. (93 mph), duration of 24 hr., elevation of up to 7,300 meters (24,000 ft.), range of 1,700 km (1,100 miles), and payload of 4X100 kg (220 lbs.) bombs. Russia is reported to have 46 of these drones being operated in Ukraine, hunting for Ukrainian infrastructures and US HIMARS units in Ukraine. The L-70 guns are teamed with Israeli radars purchased with a public fundraising RADAROM from January 30 to February 24, raising 14 million euros for multifunctional military radars for Ukraine's armed forces. The radars are priced at about 1 million euros each. The radars will be deployed near Ukrainian strategically important sites, such as power plants and water supply systems. The campaign was led by charities, including Blue/Yellow, Laisvės TV, 1K Fund, Strong Together, and the Lithuanian public broadcaster LRT. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy and his wife, Olena Zelenska, made a video address to express their gratitude to the people of Lithuania.

Lithuanian President Gitanas Nausėda and the Prime Ministers of Estonia, Latvia, and Poland composed a joint letter that called for using around 300 billion euros worth of the frozen assets of the Russian Central Bank for rebuilding Ukraine. The letter was addressed to the President of the European Council Charles Michel, the European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, and Prime Minister Ulf Kristersson of Sweden, which holds the EU's rotating presidency. The letter states, "The frozen assets have to be used to rebuild Ukraine as soon as possible. We cannot wait for the war to end and a peace agreement to be signed."

Last year Lithuania imposed a ban on the retransmission of Russian TV channels that are subject to European Union sanctions because of Russia's invasion of Ukraine. The Lithuanian Radio and Television Commis-

sion (RTCL) recognized that the banned channels were being viewed via the Internet and has ordered Internet service providers to block IP addresses to prevent further viewing.

The Seimas unanimously passed a motion to ban Russian and Belarusian athletes from competing in the 2024 Paris Olympic Games. The International Olympic Committee said it was open to permitting the Russian and Belarusian athletes to participate as unaffiliated neutrals.

Lithuania handed over a new military aid package to Ukraine, which included 155-mm ammunition for towed large guns (howitzers), vehicles, and food rations, which brings the support to 450 million euros (\$478 million). Each round weighs about 45 kg. (100 lbs.). The howitzer can deliver it on target 24 to 32 km (15 to 20 miles) away. The Ukrainian army fires between 6,000 and 8,000 rounds per day.

### Covid – 19

Lithuania is averaging about 300 new cases and 1 death per day, with approximately 200 primary, 100 secondary, and 10 tertiary cases. The 14-day primary infection rate has edged down to 143.5 cases per 100,000 people and a 7-day percentage of positive tests at 22.7 %.

In late March, Lithuania reported a daily infection of 272 cases and 1 death. Of the new cases, 199 were primary, 62 were secondary, and 11 were tertiary. There were 116 Covid-19 cases in hospitals and 3 in the ICU. The 14-day primary infection rate decreased to 153.5 cases per 100,000 people, with a 7-day percentage of positive cases at 17.6 percent. At its peak in February 2020, the daily infection rate was 14,000. The vaccination rate of at least one jab stands at 69.7%.

### Business

The German medical and safety equipment company, Drager, plans on expanding its software engineering subsidiary, QuaDigi, from 70 employees to 130, with offices in Kaunas and a new R&D lab in Vilnius. The company is looking to add specialists in embedded systems, cybersecurity, C/C++, C#, Python, and Java. Drager provides internships to new graduates and those individuals willing to change their career paths. As a worldwide company, Drager has 15,700 employees in 190 countries and had sales of 3.3 billion euros in 2021.

The Finnish financial technology company, Saldo Finance UAB, which began operations in Vilnius in 2020, obtained a specialized bank license in October 2021 from the European Central Bank and has now begun operations as Saldo Bank UAB. It is regulated by the Bank of Lithuania. It will provide deposit and loan capabilities to consumers and small and medium-sized enterprises and will be the global headquarters. It currently employs 35 people and will be looking for professionals in digital marketing, analytics, software development, scoring, risk management, and product development.

With Lithuania's goal that 100% of electricity will come from renewables by 2050, it plans to open bidding on a 700-MW offshore wind farm site by the end of March 2023. The site is 36 km (22.4 miles) off the coast and should be operational by 2028. Its output is expected to supply up to 25% of Lithuania's electrical demand. The winner will need to conduct an environmental impact assessment and install transmission infrastructure to deliver electricity to the power grid.

An IT company, Uber Lithuania Software and Development, which started in 2014, announced that it is shutting down. According to Sodra, the state social insurance fund, the company had 49 employees.

Achema plans to resume fertilizer production after suspending producing ammonia in December because of the high cost of natural gas. During this downtime, it continued to produce saltpeter (potassium nitrate) and resins.

The number of tourists visiting Lithuania increased by 60% from 2021 to 2022 to 3.4 million. Accommodations numbered 1.2 million in Vilnius County, 0.9 million in Klaipėda County, 0.6 million in Kaunas County, and 0.4 million in Alytus County. These four counties accounted for 90.2 % of all overnight stays in the country.

The central bank of Lithuania, The Bank of Lithuania, does not have concerns regarding the liquidity of the country's banking system. Unlike the US, there was no relaxation of the liquidity requirements for small and medium-sized banks.

The Lithuanian Competition Court has imposed a fine of 72.6 million euros on the Lithuanian Association of Pharmacies and eight pharmaceutical wholesale, retail, and consultants for illegal agreements on markups for reimbursable medicines. The group had sought to delay

payments until appeals were concluded. The delay was rejected.

Lithuania launched a tender for the development of a 700 MW wind farm 35 km (22.4 miles) in the Baltic Sea without state aid. The project is valued at 1.8 billion euros. The offshore wind farm is expected to be operational by 2028 and is expected to cover up to 25% of Lithuania's electricity consumption. A second 700 MW wind farm with state aid is expected to be launched in September 2023.

The Lithuanian Finance Ministry plans to borrow up to 1 billion euros from the European Union's Recovery Fund for business investments for export-oriented manufacturing businesses. President Gitanas Nausėda is in favor of the plan.

## General

A Lithuanian volunteer in the Ukrainian foreign legion was wounded and has been brought back to Lithuania for treatment. His condition is listed as stable and not life threatened by the Orthopedic Traumatology Clinic of the Hospital of Lithuanian University of Health Sciences Kauno Klinikos.

In preparation for Lithuania hosting the NATO summit on July 11-12, 2023, the Interior Ministry said that the police department has purchased 12 BMW 530d x Drive for 666,600 euros. They will be added to the existing fleet of 1,700 vehicles.



To enhance its development in life sciences, information and communications technologies (ICT), and engineering, Lithuania is encouraging a Memorandum of Understanding between the United Kingdom, the United States, and Lithuanian universities. The University of Missouri in St. Louis is partnering with Vytautas Magnus University in Kaunas in ICT and life sciences.

Last but not least, each year since 2012, the UN Sustainable Development Solutions Network surveys the hap-

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piness of citizens of 150 countries. The ranking is based on many factors, including GDP per capita, healthy life expectancy, social support, freedom to make life choices, freedom from corruption, and generosity. For the sixth year in a row, Finland has ranked first. Lithuania ranked 52nd in 2017 but has risen more than 30 places over the past six years to 20th this year. It was the only new country in the top 20. For comparison, the United States ranked 15th, New Zealand 10th, Estonia (31), Poland (39), Russia (40), Latvia (41), Ukraine (92), and last Afghanistan.

Ukraine's Kyiv War Museum has lent Lithuania's Vytautas Magnus War Museum a destroyed Russian T-72B tank for display in Cathedral Square in central Vilnius. A 36-year-old man spray-painted the tank and was detained for disorderly conduct.

Of Lithuania's 2.7 million residents, about 100,000 are Orthodox Christians. The leader of Orthodox Christians, Patriarch Bartholomew recently met with Lithuanian Prime Minister Ingrida Šimonytė, who expressed concern about some Ukrainian and Belarusian refugees affiliated with the Russian Orthodox Church and its leader Patriarch Kirill who supports Vladimir Putin and Russian aggression in Ukraine and is barred from entering Lithuania. Patriarch Bartholomew said that he

would work to establish a branch of the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople (Istanbul) separate from the Russian Moscow Patriarchate. During his 3-day official visit, Bartholomew also met with President Gitanas Nausėda and the Roman Catholic Archbishop of Vilnius, Gintaras Grušas.

Yuri Mei, a former Soviet soldier, was released from prison in Lithuania and returned to Russia. He had been convicted of participating in the Soviet tank column heading toward Vilnius on January 13, 1991. He was arrested in March 2014 while entering Lithuania from Kaliningrad. In 2019, the Vilnius District Court sentenced him to seven years in prison, but three years were added and one year was commuted. He served a total of nine years.

In a list of countries where women far outnumber men, Lithuania ranked 6th at 53.07%. In comparison, the US ranked 83rd at 50.46%. In part, the Lithuanian disparity is caused by self-destructive behavior of alcohol abuse, and over 30% smoke cigarettes. Lithuanian health authorities have focused on reducing both habits. In addition, young and productive Lithuanian men have emigrated to Germany and England in search of higher pay and broader opportunity.

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