

*The Rough Road to the West: Lithuania 1990-1998*¹

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Historical retrospect

Lithuania is the only one of the Baltic states with a historical statehood. The largest expansion of the Great Duchy of Lithuania included the regions of the Baltic Sea and the Black Sea. Poland's continuously increasing influence led to the creation of a Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth (Union of Lublin, 1569). In this way the fate of Lithuania was joined to Poland. After partitioning of the commonwealth, Lithuania was incorporated into the territory of the empire of the Czar.² The historical Great Duchy was the legitimization of the demands of Lithuanian nationalism developed late in the 19th century. The period after the Union of Lublin was considered a phase of decline. For that reason the distancing from Poland - as opposed to the sometimes very severe politics of Russification was considered self-explanatory by Lithuanian intelligentsia.

During World War I German troops occupied Lithuania in autumn 1915. From the beginning, the country was the object of various German political goals. The population suffered from the occupying army, which plundered the resources of Lithuania, forced men into labor and introduced mandatory German language lessons beginning in elementary schools. In 1917 Germany finally acknowledged that Lithuania could be more than a part of a future Polish kingdom. In Vilnius the foundation of a Council of Lithuania was allowed. This was certainly seen by the military forces as a help for their own intentions and as an obsequious instrument. However, the *Taryba* (i.e. Council of Lithuania) was to quickly emancipate itself. While the Germans were planning an indirect annexation of Lithuania, Lithuanian politicians strove for real independence. When, at the beginning of 1918, the German plans became too evident, the *Taryba* decided to take a symbolic step: on February 16th, 1918, it declared independence. The future state was to be founded on a democratic basis; the actual type of state was to be decided by a freely elected constituent assembly. The breakdown of the German Reich in November 1918 finally paved the way. Indeed, the young nation had still to defend itself against German "Freikorps" as well as against the Red Army marching westwards and Polish troops, but in 1920 the Lithuanian Republic was assured.

In regard to foreign policies, Lithuania was burdened with two problems: during the first meetings of the *Taryba*, there was already no doubt that Vilnius - the former capital of the Great Duchy - should also be the future capital of the young nation. However, in October 1920 Poland suddenly occupied Vilnius and the surrounding region. This incident confirmed historical reservations of Lithuanian politicians against Poland. Lithuania refused to recognize Polish occupation and demanded the return of Vilnius. During most of the period between the wars, there were no diplomatic relations between Lithuania and Poland. The conflict over Vilnius destroyed any hopes for a joint policy of the states that came into being in East Middle Europe in 1918/19.

The second territorial conflict arose at the border to the German Reich. The Treaty of Versailles separated the region around Memel/Klaipėda from Germany and put it under the sovereignty of the Entente. A Lithuanian minority, the "Prussian Lithuanians", lived in East Prussia. For this reason, Lithuania hoped to get the region of Klaipėda. When it appeared that these aspirations were not to be realized by diplomatic means, a "rebellion" led by the

¹First published in: "Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte", *Beilage zur Wochenzeitung Das Parlament*, B 37/98 (September 4, 1998), 35-45. The article is published here virtually unchanged, minor corrections are inserted in brackets [].

²Manfred Hellmann, *Grundzüge der Geschichte Litauens und des litauischen Volkes* (Darmstadt, 1990), 4.

“Prussian Lithuanians” was staged in the region of Klaipėda to gain control of the region. It is true that the advance into Klaipėda in January 1923 accomplished this task, but Lithuania had to agree to an international understanding granting special status of the region (an own diet, bilingualism, etc.). The German dominated administration of the Klaipėda region, working together with the consulate general of the Reich and using the legal means of the Klaipėda statute, prevented Lithuania from truly gaining a firm footing in this region.³

The foreign policy of Lithuania was caught in a vicious circle. On the one hand, the country belonged to the revisionist powers concerning Vilnius, on the other concerning Klaipėda it adhered to the status quo created by the Treaty of Versailles. This contradiction was irreconcilable, prevented a clear and definite aim, and culminated in the catastrophe of the first Republic at the end of the 1930's. Three ultimatums sealed Lithuania's fate: in March 1938 Poland used a border incident to force the opening of diplomatic relations with Lithuania, which was more or less understood as an oath of disclosure regarding the Vilnius question; in March 1939 the German Reich forced Lithuania to cede Klaipėda, and in June 1940 the Soviet Union - in the aftermath of the Hitler-Stalin pact - annexed the three Baltic States.

In 1926 Lithuania had already turned its back to democracy. When a left, liberal government replaced the previous Christian-Democratic-conservative coalition and took first steps to limit the influence of the Catholic church, to establish schools for the Polish-speaking minorities and to amnesty political prisoners (most of them were Bolsheviks), officers of the Kaunas' garrison revolted - with the silent approval of the conservatives - on December 17th, 1926. An authoritarian presidential regime under the leadership of one of the most famous Lithuanian politicians, Antanas Smetona, was established and succeeded in staying in power until June 1940.

The Soviet rule, interrupted by the no less horrible interlude of the second German occupation (1941- 1944), was to become a traumatic experience for the Lithuanian society in this century. Thousands were deported and killed in the Stalinist Gulag system. Until about 1954, Lithuanian partisans, called forest brothers, fought against the Soviets without mercy. In Lithuania, there is virtually no family that can not claim victims of this early phase of Soviet rule. For present day Lithuanian identity, these occurrences have a significant meaning. Hushed up until the end of the 1980's, the survivors now relish a special status as symbols of the Lithuanian fight for freedom.

By the 1960's, a very important trend was emerging that had great impact on the reclaiming of independence. Lithuanian speaking members of Lithuania's Communist party steadily maintained between 70 and 80 percent of the entire Communist party.⁴ Despite the often severe policies against the Catholic Church and sometimes strong measures of Sovietization, many members of the CP (Communist Party) considered themselves *Lithuanian Communists*.

The Fight for Independence

At the end of 1989, Lithuania took the lead in the fight for independence of the Baltic States. The Lithuanian CP (Communist Party) (LCP) declared its independence from the KPdSU as first Socialistic party of the Soviet Union in December 1989. The great majority of the Lithuanian CP (LCP) shared this decision; they had clearly chosen Lithuania over Moscow. In conjunction with the people's front movement of the Baltic States, a national

³See above all Vytautas Žalys, *Ringens um Identität. Warum Litauen zwischen 1923 und 1939 im Memelgebiet keinen Erfolg hatte* [Kova dėl identiteto. Kodėl Lietuvai nesisekė Klaipėdoje tarp 1923-1939m.] (Lüneburg 1993).

⁴Alfred Erich Senn, *Gorbachev's Failure in Lithuania* (New York, 1995), p.13.

movement was also founded in Lithuania. Sajūdis (i.e. “movement”) competed increasingly with the CP, although the bulk of its members also belonged to the Communist party. The first free elections for the Supreme Soviet were the first clear victory for Sajūdis; Vytautas Landsbergis was elected President of Parliament.

The parliament proclaimed the recovery of independence on March 11, 1990.⁵ Moscow responded with an economic blockade to bring the rebellious republic to its knees. The situation escalated dramatically at beginning of January 1991; Vilnius was more or less separated from the outside world by Soviet troops; citizens demonstrated round the clock in front of the Vilnius’ parliament and television tower to protect the legitimate government from the troops driving continuously through the city. On January 13, 1991, Soviet special guards attacked the television tower and staged a massacre of the unarmed demonstrators: Thirteen Lithuanians, among them a 24-year-old woman, were rolled over by tanks or shot.

Although the reasons for this action are still not clear, it is certain that the attack on the television tower was the initial spark in the establishment of Gorbachev’s presidential authority in Lithuania. In addition to the reaction from the West, the impressive conduct of the Lithuanian population thwarted these plans. Hundreds of thousands of citizens from all over the country accompanied the victims and demonstrated in this way for the country's independence. Despite the tense atmosphere, the Lithuanian people and the government maintained rebellion without violence; not one Soviet soldier was attacked. The Baltic people fought peacefully for sovereignty. This process ended in August 1991 with the unsuccessful revolt at Moscow, which fastened international recognition of the Baltic States.

The reinstalled Lithuanian state is comprised of 65200 square kilometers of land; approximately 3.7 million people live there, more than 80 percent of which speak the Lithuanian language. The largest minorities are the Russians (8.3 percent) and the Poles (7 percent). A minority problem as in Estonia or in Latvia does not exist. In 1989 Lithuania took a remarkable step and allowed all inhabitants who are not Lithuanians by birth to unconditionally apply for Lithuanian citizenship.⁶

Transformation: from Planned Economy to Free Market

After the dramatic occurrences of the years 1989 - 1991, Lithuania had achieved national sovereignty, but the economy suffered from the effects of 50 years of government-controlled economics. The industrialization of Lithuania did not really occur until Soviet period; from an economic point of view, the first republic was clearly agriculture-oriented. Forty percent of the factories were classified as All-Union enterprises, highlighting a special problem: The close interaction with the Soviet Union was an additional barrier to economical transformation. Lithuania chose a gradual path to system transformation, keeping social expenses to a minimum. They did not want to destroy the old system without having first created a new one. The future economic system was to be based on a free market, whereby the state had to ensure a strong social component (welfare state).⁷

A key aspect is privatization. Agricultural reform was the current central issue in Lithuania. The problems on the administrative level were enormous. The former owners or their descendants were to be given back their land or receive compensation. Initially no more than 50 hectares could be purchased. Several successive laws eventually expanded the size of

⁵Since the annexation of Lithuania was against international law, the Lithuanian state continued to legally exist during the 50 years of Soviet rule.

⁶Caroline Taube, “Minority Rights in Present Lithuania”, *Die deutsche Volksgruppe in Litauen und im Memelland während der Zwischenkriegszeit und aktuelle Fragen des deutsch-litauischen Verhältnisses* [ed. by Boris Meissner and oth] (Hamburg, 1998), p.424.

⁷Tomas Bartusevičius, “Probleme der Systemtransformation am Beispiel der Wirtschaft der Republik Litauen”, *Jahrestagung 1993*[ed. by Litauisches Kulturinstitut] (Lampertheim 1994), p.53-54.

the parcels to 150 hectares. More than 80 percent of the land is now privately owned again. But a trend has occurred during recent years which could negatively influence the future: Between 1994 and 1996 the average farm size fell from 8.5 to 7.6 hectares. This could make the competitiveness of these farms questionable, if Lithuania were to become a member of the European Union.

The privatization of industrial objects occurred with (coupons) investment checks. Every citizen could receive an investment check. The intention was to grant everyone the same chances in this new era. The second phase technically began in 1995 (actual start: August 1996) allowing domestic and foreign investors competitive access to large government-owned facilities. Final judgment on this issue can not yet be passed; private industry now tops 80 percent, whereby this figure also includes many newly established factories and enterprises.⁸

In the summer 1993, Lithuania introduced the Litas as its national currency. To ensure stability of the currency, it was firmly linked to the US dollar (4 LTL (Lithuanian Litas) equivalent 1 USD (U.S. dollar) by a currency board. This helped to deter speculation and allowed a restrictive financial policy. But the fixed exchange rate has caused a deficit in the balance on goods, services and unilateral transfers, leading to the call to release the currency from this restriction. The government has recently confirmed that currency release is planned within the next two years.⁹ The reform of banking and finances experiences strong recession between the end of 1995 and the beginning of 1996, when within a short period of time some of the strongest Lithuanian banks went bankrupt and many Lithuanians lost their savings. The crisis escalated in a government scandal of which the then minister president Adolfas Šleževičius became the victim.¹⁰ In the meantime the situation has consolidated once again, supported among other things by positive trends in recent years.

The first years after 1991 brought dramatic decline to all branches of the economy: in 1992 alone the production fell 51.6 percent compared to the previous year, the inflation rate was between 20 and 30 percent during this time. Liberalization and privatization led simultaneously to rapid increases in rent and incidental expenses, plunging the nation into a deep crisis. In 1993 the GNP fell 30 percent compared to 1992!

In 1994 the first gleams of hope appeared; now steady economic recovery and continued growth are standard. The inflation rate in 1997 was below 10 percent for the first time, which - in conjunction with higher wages - posed substantial relief for Lithuanian households. Consolidation of the national budget has also been achieved in recent years.

The GNP is a good indication of the situation; it increased 4.2 percent in 1996 and 6 percent in 1997 (estimate for 1998: approx. 8 percent). The dynamic growth is unmistakable, especially since the portion of GNP from private industry has increased so dramatically (1992: 37 percent; 1996: 68 percent). In the meantime private economy dominates trading and farming; private farming produces 70 percent of the agricultural output.¹¹ Economic dependence on Russia has decreased substantially. Russia is still the main commercial partner of Lithuania for import as well as export, but the number two export country is the Federal Republic of Germany. Direct investments from the West will continue to increase in the future, because investment in Lithuania is becoming more and more attractive.

⁸Data according to *Lithuanian Human Development Report 1997* [ed. by United Nations Development Program]. Source: www.undp.lt/HDR/1997; afterwards cited as "Lithuanian Human Development Report"; *Baltikum Hauptbericht April 1998* [ed. by Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung GmbH Informationsdienste] (Frankfurt a.M., 1998), p.20.

⁹"Report of the World Bank", in: *Lithuania*. www.worldbank.org.

¹⁰Joachim Tauber, "Politik und Gesellschaft in Litauen 1995/96: Politische Normalität – soziale Defizite," *Der Osten Europas im Prozeß der Differenzierung. Fortschritte und Mißerfolge der Transformation* [Ed. by Bundesinstitut für ostwissenschaftliche und internationale Studien] (München, 1997), p.117-118.

¹¹See: footnote 8.

There are still many tasks to accomplish in politics and administration (e.g. reduction of shadow economy, reform of taxation, tariff legislation, expansion of infrastructure, etc.), but it is evident that Lithuania has completed the most difficult phase of economic transition. Statistics show that the economy is continuously improving, but the more important question is: How does this transformation affect the population?

The Social Effects of Transformation

In the year 1996, 46 of every 100,000 Lithuanians committed suicide - one of the highest suicide rate in the world.¹² While suicide can have many causes, the dramatic increase since 1990 indicates the difficult life faced by large parts of the population. The level of salaries could not keep pace with high inflation and the rising prices, despite recent positive economic development. The price of a loaf of bread rose 135 percent between 1993 and 1995. High utilities - heating, electricity and water - account for a substantial portion of household expenses.¹³ For a society that, until recently, was accustomed to Soviet paternalism, these are new, grievous experiences, which play a substantial role in system transformation. Thus 77 percent of Lithuanians see the decline in the standard of living as the most important problem; 72 percent think the most important duty of the government is ensuring financial prosperity.¹⁴

This issue shows an increasing break in Lithuanian society. While the people working in private industry are generally content with the development, there are clear losers as a result of the changing system: retirees, the rural population and employees in public utilities, to name a few. It becomes evident when comparing the average salary of banking and financing (1471 Litas) with wages in the agricultural sector (279 Litas).¹⁵ The crass difference in wages demonstrates the unbalanced structure of income and the resulting social consequences in a drastic way.

Today the reformed social system is already near the limit of its capacity. Thus there is little leeway for social measures, most of which is understandably used to increase pensions. Although official unemployment figures are relatively low (1997: 5.6 percent¹⁶), they burden the social welfare system more and more.

The effects are especially clear in the education system. Since educators are amongst the worst paid employees, transferring to the private sector (e.g. as a translator or guide) is especially tempting to them. Thus teachers of West European languages are hard to find. About a third of examinees do not even intend to teach at school.¹⁷

Strict financial policies prevent quick improvements of the situation. Wages and pensions have risen continually over the last few years, but it is still not sufficient to maintain the same standard of living as during the Soviet period - although it was low - for large parts of the population. Since about 1996 the situation has improved due to consolidation: Lower inflation helped to close the gap between income and prices somewhat.¹⁸

Discontent with civil servant salaries has led to extensive corruption. Although all Lithuanians authorities battle corruption, the evil can not be abolished by administration measures alone. The high susceptibility of civil servants to private gratuities can be traced

¹²Lithuanian Human Development Report.

¹³Tomas Bartusevičius, *Die wirtschaftliche Entwicklung in Litauen seit 1993* [ed. by Litauisches Kulturinstitut], (1995), p.103.

¹⁴Lithuanian Human Development Report, Chapter 7.

¹⁵Ibid., Chapter 3.4.

¹⁶Ibid., Chapter 4.1. Adding the hidden unemployment, it is reasonable to assume an unemployment of 14 percent in 1997.

¹⁷Tauber, *Politik*, p.121.

¹⁸The average monthly salary was 947 Litas in March 1997. This is about 24 percent higher than in March of the previous year. See the report of the Lithuanian News Agency (ELTA), April 27, 1998, in: www.elta.lt. Afterwards cited as ELTA.

back to their social situation, whereby the old Soviet mentality plays an important part. Under these conditions, the population can have no confidence in government administration; only 2 percent of Lithuanians are proud of their authorities and only 37 percent think they are trustworthy.¹⁹

The recent case involving the Lithuanian telephone company showed that people's patience is worn out. When it was announced that local calls - until now free- would cost something, the greatest mass protests in Lithuania since the beginning of independence occurred.²⁰ The parliament was called to a special session, and all politics parties commented on the telephone conflict. It was of special concern that the increase in rates was linked to the privatization of the Lithuanian telephone company. People suspected foul play between authorities and the purchasers of Lietuvos Telekomas, the cost of which was to be carried by the population. The demonstrations targeted not only the increase in rates for local calls, but also the privatization of the telephone company. Even the vice president of parliament realized that the planned measures were not popular, but he thought there was no other way, if Lithuania wanted to be admitted in the European Union.²¹ Under public pressure, the increase in rates and the privatization of the telephone company were postponed.

This event also demonstrates the many changes in Lithuanian society during the past eight years. The public has found its place in Lithuanian political culture. The great interest in politics²² has been a result of the media. In recent years Lithuanian newspapers have uncovered some scandals through investigative journalism and taken seriously their role as "the fourth estate." When, during the banking scandal of 1995/96, it became known that the prime minister Šleževičius, based on insider information, withdrew most of the money from his private accounts shortly before one of the greatest Lithuanian banks crashed, such a great public protest arose that the minister, who initially had no intention to resign, finally had to give in to pressure and step down.²³ Thus it is no surprise that the media are considered trustworthy by more than 70 percent of the population, giving them the top position.²⁴

Another problem that concerns the public is the dramatic increase in crime. Besides the decreased standard of living, the Lithuanians consider the fight against crime the most important issue.²⁵ In 1988 21,337 crimes were recorded; in 1996 the figure was 68,053. The generally improved situation in Lithuania led to some reduction in crime (especially capital crime), but the situation remains critical. Also, an especially rapid increase in juvenile crime can be observed: almost half of the criminals are between 14 and 24 years old. For the first time, independent Lithuania is confronted with crimes unknown until now, e.g. economic criminality or organized racketeering.²⁶ Despite government action, the population has not regained trust in internal safety.²⁷

Without doubt, the personal trials form the largest burden on Lithuania's democracy due to transformation. The attempt to avoid social hardship by gradual change must be considered a failure. Approval ratings of individual aspects of public life clearly show this: Parliament, government and the president can hope for no more than one third approval ratings. More than 80 percent of Lithuanians have reservations regarding the justice, finance

¹⁹Lithuanian Human Development Report, Chapter 7.

²⁰ELTA, February 3 and 4, 1998. *A charge of seven Centas per minute was planned.*

²¹Ibid., February 4, 1998.

²²53 percent are "very interested" or "interested" in politics; From: *Lithuanian Human Development Report*, Chapter 7.

²³Tauber, *Politik*, p.117-118.

²⁴ELTA, November 27, 1997.

²⁵75 percent are of this opinion. See: *Lithuanian Human Development Report*, Chapter 7.

²⁶For more detail, see: International Crime Victim Survey in Lithuania. Final Report [ed. by Ministry of Justice of the Republic of Lithuania and Institute of Law] (Vilnius, 1997), p.14.

²⁷Only 21percent hold the police for trustworthy, while 73 percent do not trust the law enforcement agencies. *Lithuanian Human Development Report*, Chapter 7.

and security authorities. Only 5 percent trust the banking system.²⁸ The people are skeptical of complete liberalization of economic relations: 57 percent think that the state must protect national economy from foreign competition, and 44 percent think that regulation of industrial relations should be handled by the government.²⁹

These burdens are compensated for by recovered independence and the experiences gained during 50 years of Soviet occupation. Statehood is the undisputed legitimization of the Lithuanian republic: 60 percent of the Lithuanians are proud of the historical past of their nation.³⁰ The current consolidation must be politically confirmed to dispel reservations and to ensure the standard of living and raise it in the long term. Only then can the Lithuanian democracy hope not only for emotional but also for rational approval.

Lithuanian faces more great changes. The continued paternalistic trust in the state, along with the paradox neglect of public institutions, prevents initiative and responsibility. This can be seen in the Lithuanian attitudes towards taxation. Even businesses declare lower wage payment to their employees than they actually pay. Moonlighting is common, but the income is seldom declared. Thus a substantial portion of the economy evades the treasury, whereby silent consent prevails between all parties. The shadow economy is currently estimated at 18 percent of the entire economic performance.³¹

While the understanding of the role and function of the state still relies on old ideas, first clear signs of system transformation in the demography are becoming evident. Between 1990 and 1996 the number of marriages decreased 44 percent. More and more partnerships exist without marriage certificates, and an increasing number of young people remain single. During the Soviet period many Lithuanians married young, resulting in a high divorce rate (almost every second marriage ended in divorce). Now a clear trend shows people marrying later, leading to less divorces and a lower birth rate. These trends indicate that great changes will continue to occur in the traditionally patriarchal Lithuanian society in the next decade.

The Political System

Lithuania is a parliamentary democracy. The constitution guaranties human rights and separation of justice. It ensures the rights of national minorities and guarantees freedom of religion, conscience and confession. The parliament, the Seimas, is elected for four years; parties of national minorities do not require 5 percent for representation, as in some other countries. In addition to the Seimas, the people elect the President for five years. He also has the right to initiate laws and nominates the Prime Minister for approval of the Seimas. A special aspect of the Lithuanian constitution grants the President the right to dissolve the parliament. But this is restricted by the fact that the newly elected Seimas, with a majority of 3/5 can declare new presidential elections (art. 87). Art. 87 has not been used yet. The President's position in relation to parliament and government is stronger than that of the purely representative function of the German President, but it does not compare to the position of the French President or the American President. The most important task of the office is stated in art. 84 of the constitution: The President: "... should lay down the basis foreign policy issues and execute foreign policy in conjunction with the government". This right to set broad rules requires maintaining a balance between the head of state and government, which thus far has not been a problem. [In spring 1999 the first conflict occurred

²⁸Ibid.

²⁹Ibid. 43 percent hold the state responsible for moral values.

³⁰Ibid.

³¹Ibid.

between President and Prime Minister, which ended with the resignation of the Prime Minister Vagnorius.]³²

The outcome of parliamentary elections are always a surprise. After Lithuanian voters had granted Sąjūdis a clear majority in February 1990 and the president of parliament, Vytautas Landsbergis, became a figurehead of Lithuania's fight for independence, a victory for the Landsbergis fraction was anticipated in autumn 1992.

Instead, the former Communist Party, which has called itself Democratic Labor Party (LDDP - Lietuvos demokratinė darbo partija) since December 1990, won the elections with a landslide victory. In contrast to the conservatives, the LDDP had a developed infrastructure in the rural regions, too; it had an extremely popular party chairman, Algirdas Brazauskas, and stood clearly for an independent Lithuania. During the election campaign, the LDDP promised a more socially bearable and slower system transformation, which appealed to many voters. Therefore the victory of the social democratically oriented Communists was not a return to the socialistic system of old. In February of 1993, Brazauskas was then elected Lithuanian President with 60 percent of the votes.³³ However, the LDDP could not transform its great success into permanent support. Brazauskas was (based of his position) obliged to remain impartial and to resign his post as party chairman and party member. Several scandals shocked the government and the party, and the LDDP could not fulfill its promise of a more socially bearable transformation. The slowing down of reforms in key areas such as privatization was criticized in the West, which is due at least partly to the absurd classification of the LDDP as a Communist party. Also under the LDDP, the path to the west was not abandoned, the principal interior and exterior disposition of Lithuania was agreed on by all parties equally.

The bitter defeat in 1992 brought the founding of a Conservative Party, coming from Sąjūdis, in 1993. The Homeland Union/Conservatives of Lithuania (TS/LK - Tevynės sąjunga/Lietuvos konservatoriai) clearly represents - under its party leader Landsbergis - the national conservative side more so than the Lithuanian Christian Democrats (LKDP - Lietuvos krikščionių demokratų partija). The increasing strength of conservatives was apparent in the communal elections in March 1995 and resulted in a catastrophic defeat of the LDDP in the parliamentary elections on October 20th, 1996. The Homeland Union and the Christian Democrats formed a coalition with a substantial majority. Gediminas Vagnorius was elected prime minister. He already held the position from January 1991 until July 1992. Landsbergis celebrated his comeback as president of parliament. The table shows the results of the parliamentary election in 1996 for the most important parties and gives information on the Lithuanian parties.

Party	Votes In %	Seats (Direct mandates included)	
		1996	1992
Tevynės Sąjunga (Lietuvos konservatoriai) The Homeland Union (Lithuanian Conservatives)	29.80	70	--
Lietuvos krikščionių demokratų partija Lithuanian Christian Democrats	9.91	14	16

³²For the constitution, see: Zenonas Namavičius, *Die Verfassung der Republik Litauen. Verfassungsgeschichte, Menschenrechte, Staatsaufbau* (Lampertheim, 1994), p.39.

³³Tauber, *Politik*, p. 116; Joachim Tauber, "Die Auseinandersetzung mit der kommunistischen Vergangenheit in Litauen", *Berichte des Bundesinstituts für ostwissenschaftliche und internationale Studien*, 28 (1997).

Lietuvos demokratinė darbo partija Lithuanian Democratic Labor Party	9.52	11	73
Lietuvos centro sąjunga Lithuanian Center Union	8.24	14	2
Lietuvos socialdemokratų partija Social Democratic Party of Lithuania	6.60	10	8
Lietuvos moterų partija Lithuanian Women's Party	3.67	1	-
Lietuvos lenkų rinkimų akcija Election Movement of the Poles	2.98	2	4
Lietuvos liberalų sąjunga Lithuanian Liberals Association	1.84	3	0
Lietuvos socialistų partija Lithuanian Socialistic Party	0.73	0	-

It is noteworthy that the political middle of the party spectrum is under-represented. But since then, a refined party system has evolved without susceptibility to extremists. A contributing factor has surely been that the previous change in government impressively verifies the democratic intentions of the parties. The political system passed its first test with flying colors.

This was also apparent during the presidential elections. For a long time it was unclear whether the officiating President Brazauskas, who still has high approval rate, intended to run again. In October 1997, Brazauskas announced that he did not intend to run for reelection. In addition to health reasons, he felt that he was identified too closely with the Communistic past of Lithuania (Brazauskas has been the leader of the LKP since 1988) and that it was time for a new generation with clean slates to take over the helm.³⁴

It finally came to a final ballot between the 44-year-old Artūras Paulauskas, who was supported by the left powers, and the 71-year-old Valdas Adamkus, who was originally nominated by the Center Union. Landsbergis, whose strong reputation in the West is in stark contrast to his popularity in Lithuania, was eliminated in the first round with 16 percent of votes. In a close decision on January 4, 1998, Adamkus won the election with 968,032 votes Paulauskas's 953,775 votes. Adamkus is an exiled Lithuanian; his family emigrated to the USA at the end of the World War II. As former director of an environmental institute, the new President has extensive administrative experience. His biography represents a decidedly western trend.³⁵ Despite the most objective and composed election campaign, more than 70 percent of voters participated in the final ballot - a figure last reached in autumn 1992. Between 1992 and 1997, participation fell from 50 to 40 percent. This is surely an indication of public opinion on the one hand, but on the other it should not be granted too much significance.

³⁴*Jo Ekscelencijos Lietuvos Respublikos Prezidento Algirdo Brazausko kalba per Lietuvos televizija (The speech of His Excellency President of Republic of Lithuania Algirdas Brazauskas on Lithuanian Television)*, October 9, 1997, in: <http://rc.lrs.lt/president/kalba>.

³⁵A first comment by Alfred Erich Senn, "The 1998 Lithuanian Presidential Election", *Analysis of Current Events*, 10, 2, (February 1998), p.1.

All together it can be said that the political institutions are firmly established in Lithuania, changes in power occur democratically, and the political elite firmly support the democratic form of government.

NATO and EU: Cornerstones of Exterior Policy

There is no dispute over fundamental foreign policy issues: the aim is the integration in transatlantic and European structures. As the first country to be part of the former Soviet Union, Lithuania asked for full membership to NATO on January 4th, 1994. On his first official visit to Brussels, President Brazauskas declared, "Security and stability of a country are absolute prerequisites for a functioning democracy and a free market. We are convinced that Lithuania's national security is an inseparable part of European security as a whole. Lithuania can not guarantee its security on its own. We think that European security - and therefore also Lithuanian security - can only be achieved by the political, economical and military integration of the affected countries; the most important institutions for such an integration are the European Union and NATO."

The Baltic desire for security is based in part on the background of Russian policy, which repeatedly launches verbal attacks against the Baltic States. In his Brussels speech, Brazauskas clearly described the problem: "Russia's comments about its specific interests and its extraordinary claim to keep peace in the so-called 'near abroad' and the former territory of the Soviet Union are not wholly consistent with the spirit of international law or the 'Partnership for peace'. Statements of specific Russian interests in the Baltic States are extremely difficult to understand, if only because Lithuania and the other Baltic States never were a legitimate part of the Soviet Union."³⁶ For Lithuania, the real problem is not the Russian minority in the country but the Russian Kaliningrad region, where strong military forces continue to be stationed.³⁷

The decisions made at the Madrid NATO Summit in July 1997 caused disappointment, even if in official statements discretion was used. While in February 1997 approval of joining NATO stood at 47.7 percent amongst the Lithuanian public, it decreased to 36.2 percent shortly before the summit, when it became clear that the Baltic States would not be in the first round of new members.³⁸ Meanwhile Lithuania, which joined the "Partnership for peace" as second eastern European country, is banking on the new NATO member, Poland, along with the USA³⁹ and the Scandinavian countries. Lithuanian-Polish relations, which after the declaration of independence were strained by the respective minorities and the historical quarrel over Vilnius, have continued to improve. On the 80th anniversary of the Lithuanian declaration of Independence, on February 16, 1998, the Polish President Kwasniewski was the only head of state to visit Vilnius; the first official visit abroad of the newly elected President Adamkus was to Warsaw.⁴⁰ Militarily, the two countries are working together on air space control; a joint Polish-Lithuanian battalion for peacekeeping missions is planned.⁴¹

³⁶Cited in: Joachim Tauber, "Litauen und die Nato", *Osteuropa*, 6, A 322ff (1994).

³⁷For this, see the reports edited by the Bundesinstitut für ostwissenschaftliche und internationale Studien herausgegebenen Berichte Nr. 17-1993 (*Kaliningrad (Königsberg), Eine russische Exklave in der baltischen Region. Stand und Perspektiven aus europäischer Sicht*); Nr. 21-1993, 25-1993 (Dieter Bingen, *Das Gebiet Kaliningrad [Königsberg]: Bestandsaufnahmen und Perspektiven. Deutsche Ansichten I und II*).

³⁸See: ELTA, July 2, 1997. In February, 29.6 percent of those questioned were undecided, in July 33.6 percent. The approval of EU membership dropped (even before the recommendations of the EU commission) from almost 50 percent to 40.2 percent.

³⁹*The Charter of Partnership among the United States of America and the Republic of Estonia, the Republic of Latvia and Republic of Lithuania*, January 16, 1998, in: www.state.gov/www/regions/eur.

⁴⁰ELTA, February 16, 1998 and April 1, 1998.

⁴¹ELTA, March 25, 1998. [The battalion was inaugurated by the two presidents in April 1999.]

For the time being the EU will not begin negotiations with Lithuania about joining the community; of all three Baltic States, only Estonia got an invitation to such talks. The Lithuanian government blamed out-of-date data for this decision by the EU Commission. They suggested that the EU recommendation was more politically motivated than objective. In late April 1998, the Lithuanian government reacted harshly to comments by Estonian President Lennart Meri, who in talks with the Polish press stated that Estonia would introduce visa requirements for Latvian and Lithuanian citizens, if it would accelerate membership to the EU. In its own statement, the Lithuanian government pointed out that the EU decision could divide the Baltic States and provoke domestic and foreign tensions. Once more, the government pointed out that the EU was negotiating with countries who are much weaker economically than Lithuania.⁴² These misgivings are not totally unfounded, as demonstrated clearly the telephone rate controversy; when for the first time arguments critical of Europe found their way into the populace by maintaining that the fees for local calls and the privatization of the telephone company were part of adaptation to EU standards.

Lithuania continues to hope for clear signals from the West; President Adamkus committed himself and his country on the occasion of his first appearance before the NATO council on April 23, 1998 with clear words: "I am here to reconfirm the principle aspirations of our state and its people, which are: integration into the European and transatlantic structures, political and economic cooperation and good neighborly relations. During my term in office, I will make every effort to ensure that Lithuania becomes a member of NATO and the EU."⁴³

Attorney of the Balts? A Lithuanian View on the Federal Republic of Germany

After regaining independence, Germany was highly esteemed in Lithuania. As the nearest Western country, it was and is the most important destination for the Lithuanian populace in Western Europe. The reunification of Germany also triggered empathy, because many Balts saw a parallel to the struggle for freedom by the Baltic people, although Lithuanians considered Germany's politics cautious commercial politics.⁴⁴

There is now constant interaction between the two countries. Many contracts and treaties, mutual cultural contacts and the support that Germany has provided in many areas have helped to strengthen relations. Particularly important is participation of many of the German federal states in projects in the economic and cultural sphere.⁴⁵ Germany's commitment in Lithuania is also aided by private initiatives.

In foreign policy, Germany assisted Lithuania in gaining the status of an associated member of the EU and supported the signing of a free trade treaty with the EU. The regional initiative of the Council of the Baltic Sea Border States, to which Lithuania and the other Baltic States belong as full-fledged members, is also of importance. Germany has played an important role in the convergence of the Baltic States to Europe, which Foreign Minister Klaus Kinkel clearly expressed in August 1996: "Germany sees itself as an attorney for the people of this region. Therefore, it is the aim of German foreign policy to link Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania more strongly and formally with European institutions. In this way, we want to

⁴²ELTA, March 30, 1998.

⁴³*Address by H.E. Mr. Valdas Adamkus, President of the Republic of Lithuania*, Brussels, 23, April 1998, in: www.nato.int/docu/speech.

⁴⁴Alfonsas Eidintas, "Deutschland und die Staatlichkeit Litauens im 20 Jahrhundert," *Nordost-Archiv N.F.*, 1, (1992), 38, with reference to Vincas Bartusevičius, "Vokietijos politika Lietuvos atžvilgiu [Germany politics on Lithuania]," *Atgimimas*, 40 (1991), 43.

⁴⁵For more details on this, see Joachim Tauber, *Die deutsch-litauischen Beziehungen seit 1990*. Paper delivered at the conference „Supermacht oder Partner? Deutschlands neue Rolle in Osteuropa“, organized by the Ev. Akademie Hofgeismar, July 4 – 6, 1997.

contribute to strengthening the independence and stability of these three countries... Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania had, in a special way, to bear the burden of European history in this century characterized by two terrible wars and forty years of Cold War. They fell victim to criminal politics, robbing them of their independence and statehood. Afterwards they had to bear the consequences for half a century... With a view of this history Germany acknowledges its special responsibility for the Baltic States.”⁴⁶

In recent years, it has become clearer and clearer, that the Lithuanian hopes in Germany were not disappointed, but gave way to a more pragmatic view. The main partners are the USA, the Scandinavian countries and, most recently, Poland.

Another problem has at least diminished if not damaged the prestige of the Federal Republic within Lithuanian society: Lithuanians are still not able to travel to Germany without a visa. The flocks of travelers coming from all over the country form huge crowds in front of the German embassy in the center of Vilnius. Despite many years of negotiations, a visa is still required. The problem has even caused the German parliament to take action; on December 9, 1997, an interfractional group brought forward a motion for the government to start negotiations with the Baltic States over the abolition of the visa requirement. The foreign policy committee of the German parliament approved with this motion on April 29, 1998.⁴⁷ [Note: On March 1, 1999, the visa requirement between Lithuania and Germany was finally abolished.]

Despite these problems, it is fair to say that, since August 1991, Germany has faithfully supported Lithuania, so that the last eight years can be considered without exaggeration the best period of German-Lithuanian relations in this century.

Conclusion

Eight years after beginning system transformation, Lithuania has made amazing headway. The foreign policy of the Baltic republic is clearly oriented to the West. The country has a functioning political system; macroeconomic data has shown positive trends for quite a while. The social situation remains difficult; a large part of the populace had to bear a decreasing standard of living, which has led to some social stratification. The Lithuanian Office of Statistics emphasized the underlying dangers of this development as early as 1996: “If Lithuania today does not find a way to guarantee its inhabitants the chance of social development, our country can tomorrow become a region of mass poverty and a small wealthy class without political stability and without social security for its people.”⁴⁸ A rough stretch of the road to the west still lies ahead for the Lithuanian Republic.

Translated by Barbara Buehler-Tauber and Robin Backhaus

⁴⁶Cited in *Leipziger Volkszeitung*, August 27, 1996.

⁴⁷Deutscher Bundestag, *Antrag Visumsfreiheit für die baltischen Staaten*, Wahlperiode, Drucksache 13/9390,; www.bundestag.de/wib/98.

⁴⁸*Žmogaus socialinė raida ir gyvenamoji aplinka 1996 m.* (Vilnius: United Nation Development Program, 1996), p.9.