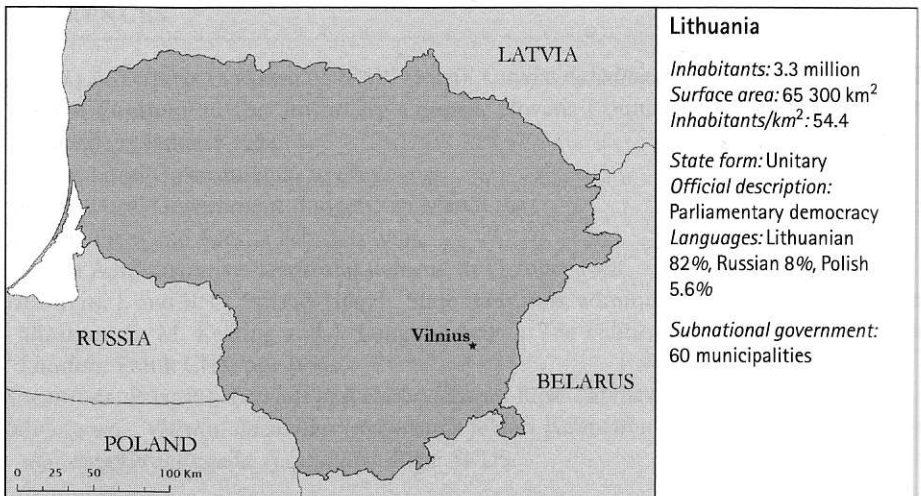


## CHAPTER 26

# LITHUANIA: BRAVE ENOUGH TO IMPLEMENT DARING DEMOCRATIC REFORMS?

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Map 26.1 Lithuania

## HISTORY AND CONCEPT OF DEMOCRACY

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The origins of the Lithuanian state date back to the second half of the twelfth century. From the sixteenth century, the Kingdom of Poland and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania were united into one indivisible state. At that time, it was one of the largest states in Europe by size as well as by the number of citizens. The political system of the republic of the two nations was unique—it was the first to have the characteristics of a modern democracy and a federation with the first written constitution (1791) in Europe and the second in the world.

At the end of the eighteenth century, Lithuania shifted from its status as a major international power, in union with Poland, to a conquered territory within the Russian Empire.

Similar to other countries of Eastern Europe that freed themselves from the Russian Empire, Lithuania in 1918 recreated itself as an independent state. Almost all political figures of Lithuania agreed that the future system of Lithuania would be a democratic parliamentary republic, which was embedded in the constitution of 1922. However, in the latter part of the 1920s, authoritarian rule, with strong presidential control, gradually replaced this.

During the Second World War, Lithuania was annexed and became one of the fifteen constituent republics of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR). The period of 1945–53 was an especially tragic time for Lithuanians, who opposed the Soviet Communist Party ideology. More than 120,000 Lithuanians were killed or deported to labour camps in Siberia and other distant parts of the USSR. Others fled from their homeland to seek refuge in the USA, Canada, Australia, and other Western European countries. However, most Lithuanians resisted, either passively or actively, the annexation of their country into the USSR.

The Soviet Communists imposed upon Lithuania a totalitarian system, which involved the abolition of the market economy in favour of centralized economic planning and collectivization of the means of production. It also meant a one-party political system with the Communist Party in control and other parties abolished. The Communist Party's goal was to transform the society by developing a 'new Soviet man' with total commitment to the Communist ideology and without allegiance to any former national or religious identity. Resistance to the Communist regime was maintained until the opportunity came for the renewal of Lithuanian independence and freedom, which began in the mid-1980s and came to fulfilment in 1990.

Lithuania was one of the most active participants in bringing about the fall of the Soviet empire, and the force that united the greatest part of the nation was the Reform Movement (*Sąjūdis*). This movement was the moral factor during the re-creation of the Lithuanian state that stimulated discussion about general democracy, and historical justice, as well as other questions, including the political

order. In 1989, it put forward its own candidates in an all-Soviet Union election to challenge those of the Communist Party for seats to represent Lithuania in the Congress of People's Deputies (Patrick and Hamot 2005). In the 1990 elections to the Supreme Council of the Lithuanian Soviet Socialist Republic, Sąjūdis won overwhelmingly against the candidates of the Lithuanian Communist Party and declared the independence of Lithuania.

The country is now developing into a modern democratic state, and has become a member of NATO (in 2002) and the European Union (in 2004). Although the establishment of the market economy has been effective, many Lithuanians and foreign observers agree that the democratic operation of state structures, human rights, and the creation of a civil society have encountered significant difficulties. Some analysts are inclined to think that the Soviet heritage is very hard to defeat, while others state that these are normal problems for a young democratic state. In our opinion, both reasons are valid.

## THE INSTITUTIONAL EXPRESSION OF DEMOCRACY

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Drawing on experiences of Lithuanian independence during the inter-war period, the new political powers sought a compromise between parliamentarism and presidentialism when drawing up the new constitution in 1992. The semi-presidential model chosen emphasized that all the powers of government are interconnected. For example, laws passed by the *Seimas* (parliament) come into force only after they are signed and officially approved by the president; the *Seimas* cannot establish or abolish ministries without a suggestion from the government; the president presents the candidature of the prime minister to the *Seimas* for consideration, appoints him upon approval of the latter, charges him to form the government, and approves its composition (Article 84 of the Constitution).

The independent status of the courts is important for the consolidation of democracy. The constitution determines that the courts shall have the exclusive right to administer justice: the Supreme Court of the Republic of Lithuania, the Court of Appeal of Lithuania, courts of counties and districts, and administrative courts. The Constitutional Court decides if laws and acts of the president and the government are constitutional. The president, the government, not less than one-fifth of the members of the *Seimas*, and the courts, have the right to address the Constitutional Court. Several recent examples, including a presidential impeachment, indicate that the Constitutional Court has been able to uphold its independence.

The constitution also states that deeds and actions of local government councils as well as of their executive bodies and officers, which violate the rights of citizens and organizations, may be appealed against in court. Such complaints are analysed by administrative courts.

The constitution also defines the form of the country's territorial system: the Republic of Lithuania is a unitary country; therefore, its territory cannot be divided into any other state formations. The country's territory is administered by establishing its administrative-territorial divisions for the functioning of local public government and territorial government.

The Lithuanian system of public administration is a mixture of the German and French traditions as well as Soviet influences. The communist years still have a big impact on public administration as well as on the social and economic development of the country.

## The electoral system

There are three elections in Lithuania: to the Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania, presidential elections, and elections to local government councils. Each election is carried out with different electoral systems. The President of the Republic of Lithuania is elected for a five-year term, applying the system of absolute majority. Although electoral participation has decreased, turnout in presidential elections is higher than in the elections to the *Seimas* and the local councils (Table 26.1, compare Tables 26.2 and 26.3).

**Table 26.1 Electoral turnout in presidential elections**

Presidential election	Turnout (%)				
	1993	1997	2002	2004	2009
First round	78.07	71.45	53.92	48.40	51.76
Second round		73.66	52.65	52.46	

Source: The Central Electoral Commission of the Republic of Lithuania.

**Table 26.2 Electoral turnout in parliamentary elections**

Elections to the parliament	Turnout (%)			
	1996	2000	2004	2008
The first vote	52.92	52.83	36.71	48.58
Repeated voting	48.08		40.26	32.37

Source: The Central Electoral Commission of the Republic of Lithuania.

**Table 26.3** Electoral turnout in local government elections

Elections to Local Government Councils	Turnout, per cent				
	1995	1997	2000	2002	2007
Voting	44.85	39.93	49.63	49.23	36.50

Source: The Central Electoral Commission of the Republic of Lithuania.

Elections to the *Seimas* are a mixed parallel election system, which in 1992 Lithuania became one of the first post-communist countries to use. Seventy-one of the 141 members of the *Seimas* are elected from single-seat constituencies. The whole of the country forms a multi-seat constituency from which the remaining seventy members are elected on the basis of proportional representation. Every elector has two votes—for a party list and for a single-seat candidate, and he may rank candidates of the chosen list. The threshold for representation in the *Seimas* is 5 per cent for parties and 7 per cent for coalitions (since 1996). Data of elector activity at the *Seimas* elections are displayed in Table 26.2.

Elections to local councils have moved from a majoritarian system to a system of proportional representation. The Law on the Fundamentals of Local Government passed in 1990 divided municipalities into two levels: the lower level (rural territorial units, settlements, and regional cities) and the higher level (regions and towns under the republic's jurisdiction). Elections were according to the majority election system. This law did not provide real self-government since municipalities, in line with the Soviet tradition, performed functions of central government locally and did not really exercise independent autonomy over local questions.

A Law on Elections to Local Government Councils in the Republic of Lithuania, modelled on the Scandinavian system of self-government, was passed in 1994. The lower-level local government institutions were abolished. Two- and later three-year council terms and a proportional system were introduced for elections of councilors. During the 1995 elections, political parties as well as political and public organizations had the right to nominate candidates, but after a new version of the Law was passed in 1996, public organizations lost that right. There are discussions about changing the election order by introducing direct elections of mayors (these are now indirectly elected). Since 2000, electors have the right to indicate the five candidates that they would like to see at the top of the party's list. In 2002, a constitutional amendment was made, according to which the term of local government councils was extended from three to four years. At the same time, the right to vote in local government elections was extended to all permanent residents of the municipalities. The number of members in local government councils (from twenty-one to fifty-one members) is related to the population size of the municipality.



**Table 26.4 Number of parties that received mandates in elections to the parliament and to local government councils**

	Number of parties (coalitions) that received mandates						
	1996	1997	2000	2002	2004	2007	2008
Elections to parliament	13		15		8		10
Elections to local government councils		19	24	23		20	

Source: Central Electoral Commission of the Republic of Lithuania.

The constitution prohibits double mandates, i.e. one cannot perform state government functions and be a member of local government councils at the same time. In addition, state officers, who according to the laws have authorization to control local government activities, cannot be members of local government councils.

The five local government elections held so far (1995, 1997, 2000, 2002, and 2007) have revealed certain problems of the existing election system. In 2007, the Constitutional Court noted that territorial communities did not have the right to nominate candidates who had not been included in lists of political parties, and it decided that this provision contradicted the standards of a democratic state and indicated that from the next elections in 2011 the law on elections should be corrected. The list election system does not make it possible to represent territorial units inside municipalities. In big constituencies with many candidates, electors do not know most of them, so they cannot make an informed choice, and the elected representatives depend more on parties and their leaders than on their electors. Such an election system also enables representatives of marginal and populist 'one leader' parties to enter local government councils, when candidates are chosen only because of the popularity of the leader (Krupavičius and Pogorelis 2004).

A significantly larger number of parties are elected to local government councils than to the *Seimas*. A comparison is given in Table 26.4.

## RELATIONS BETWEEN CENTRAL AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

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Laws and other legal acts do not regulate the president's relations with the municipalities. Based on tradition the president communicates with heads of municipalities and council members during his travels through the country, and he meets with heads of municipalities and discusses important questions with them once a year.

Municipalities have the right to participate in the preparation of laws and other legal acts that govern local government both by themselves and through the Association of Local Authorities in Lithuania (established in 1995). The representatives of the Association can participate in sessions of the parliament and the parliamentary Committee on State Administration and Local Authorities. Heads of executive institutions of municipalities must facilitate meetings between MPs and electors.

Relations between the government and the municipalities are governed by legal acts. Representatives of the government assigned to each county control whether municipalities follow the constitution and legislation. Through a bilateral commission, the Association of Local Authorities is consulted when resolutions of the government are being prepared. Representatives of the Association of Local Authorities can also participate in sessions of the government and may voice their opinions when the discussed subjects relate to the competences of local government.

## INSTITUTIONAL EXPRESSION OF SUBNATIONAL DEMOCRACY

A well-functioning local democracy needs the active participation of citizens and groups, but Lithuania lacks such traditions. Research on political culture<sup>1</sup> (Šiliauskas 2006) indicates that people are inclined to solve problems in a negative way, such as signing appeals or petitions. This is also illustrated by the tendency to use strikes and warning strikes, which is summarized in Table 26.5. The employees of the education sector are most active in these strikes.

**Table 26.5 Strikes and warning strikes, 2000–8**

	2000	2001	2005	2007	2008
Number of strikes and warning strikes	56	34	1	161	111
Average strike duration in work days	3.15	1.27	11.90	1.36	6.65
Average number of employees who participated in strikes	3 303	1 703	70	7 033*	4 624*

\*All participants were employees of the education sector.

Source: Department of Statistics to the Government of the Republic of Lithuania.

<sup>1</sup> Carried out by Klaipėda University in 1999.

Lithuanian citizens are not active in referendums, either. Of the ten national referendums held between 1990 and 2008, provisions of only four were accepted and three were regarded as invalid because of insufficient numbers of voters. During the same period fourteen referendums were initiated by citizens' groups, but the necessary amount of signatures (300,000 citizens with the right to vote) was not collected.

## Local self-government

After the re-establishment of independence, the Law on the Fundamentals of Local Government was passed in 1990, although the functions of the state and local governments were not separated, a real economic and financial base was not formed, and the functions of separate local government institutions were not coordinated.

In 1994, Lithuania carried out a territorial administrative reform, with the establishment of fifty-four municipalities with directly elected councils. There is a discussion about increasing the number of municipalities in order for the government to be closer to people. In 2000, six new municipalities were established. The sixty municipalities (see Map 26.2) vary in size from 2,400 to 550,000



**Map 26.2 Administrative division of the Republic of Lithuania**

Source: Department of Statistics to the Government of the Republic of Lithuania.



citizens, with an average of 60,000 and in area from 40 km<sup>2</sup> to 2,218 km<sup>2</sup>, with an average of 1,088.3 km<sup>2</sup>. However, one of the most negative relics of Soviet times has survived. In the six biggest cities, the municipalities that surrounded the six large cities remained, but their administrative institutions were, in most cases, located in the cities. This meant that natural territorial communities of self-government did not evolve, and the citizens encountered other inconveniences with regard to public services. Both social scientists and politicians state that the number of municipalities is not optimal for citizen participation in local government, even when compared to old democratic as well as post-Soviet countries. Surely new municipalities need to be established when the state has resources for this, and when the new municipalities will have the required administrative abilities to perform functions foreseen in the legal acts.

Citizens place much more confidence in municipalities than in other governmental institutions—parliament and government. According to the data of the Market and Opinion Research Centre Vilmorus, 34 per cent of the country's population placed confidence in municipalities in 2006. This is a positive factor when developing the democratic process in Lithuania.

In 2000, the new version of the law on self-government entrusted municipalities with sixty-one functions.<sup>2</sup> By 2008, this had risen to seventy-six. Now they are classified as independent and delegated functions. Independent functions<sup>3</sup> are exercised by municipalities in accordance with the competence granted by the constitution and legislation. When implementing these functions, municipalities have the freedom of initiative of decisions, their adoption, and enforcement, and are responsible for the fulfilment of these functions.

Activities of municipalities carried out when implementing state functions delegated to municipalities<sup>4</sup> are restricted by the decisions of the central state.

<sup>2</sup> Self-government functions are divided into four types in Lithuania: independent, limited independent, delegated (passed over) to municipalities, and arbitrary functions.

<sup>3</sup> Examples of independent functions of municipalities: drawing-up and approval of a municipal budget; setting of local fees and charges; management, use, and disposal of the land and other property which belong to a municipality by the right of ownership; ensuring learning according to the programmes of compulsory education of children under 16 years of age who live within the territory of a municipality; non-formal education of adults, organization and implementation of non-formal education programmes; cultivation of general culture and fostering of ethno-culture of the population; provision of conditions for social integration of the disabled residing within the territory of a municipality; setting-up of social housing stock and its repair, and social housing rent; primary personal and public health care; territory planning, implementation of solutions of a general plan, and detailed plans of the territory of a municipality; improvement and protection of environment quality.

<sup>4</sup> Examples of state functions: registration of acts of civil status; civil protection; fire protection; calculation and payment of compensations (heating expenses, cold and hot water expenses, etc.); calculation and payment of social benefits; control of use and accuracy of the state language; participation in preparing and implementing labour market policy measures and employment programmes; administration of agricultural production quotas; ensuring provision of social care to individuals with a severe disability; provision of primary legal aid guaranteed by the state.

The number of delegated functions increased the most—from twenty-one in 2000 to thirty-four in 2008. The transfer of functions to municipalities has positive as well as negative aspects. They provide additional resources, as state functions are financed from the state budget. On the other hand, it means that the independent part of the municipal budget decreases, which weakens the position of the council at the expense of the central administration.

From 2003, a new article to the Law on Local Self-Government regulates the social activities of the representative of the community of the residential locality, who serves on a public basis. Representatives are elected in local communities by the citizens of the village, several villages, the city, or the town. To date their functions have been quite insignificant—to care for the interests of the community, to represent the community in the eldership (an eldership is a department of the municipal administration with legal entity rights), to inform citizens, to motivate the population to look after the territory of the residential area, and to organize cultural and sports life. Community representatives may initiate meetings or form a deliberative eldership council. This legal recommendatory provision has previously not received much support from the citizens. Research<sup>5</sup> shows that, in 2005, only 56 per cent of the municipalities had approved the order of election of community representatives and 9 per cent of municipalities were planning to do so.

In order to strengthen the role of the representatives of the residential locality communities, a new edition of Articles 33–35 of the Law on Local Self-Government came into force in 2009, where the status of a community representative (*seniūnaitis*) is clarified. But since decisions of the meetings of *seniūnaičiai* are only advisory, it is unlikely that they will be very important.

## Fiscal decentralization

Financial decentralization is very important for local self-government and democracy. After the passing of the Law on Local Self-Government, there was a discussion about how much local government can be financially independent from central government and still be financially capable of solving local matters. An important question is what are the rates and proportions of state (central government) and municipal budgets in the overall national budget. The value of the rate shows the level of financial decentralization. This depends greatly on tax return sources. The present sources are listed in Table 26.6.

<sup>5</sup> Research, commissioned by the Ministry of the Interior of the Republic of Lithuania, was carried out by M. Bernotienė, S. Nefas, and J. Vaičiūnienė (2005). *Gyvenamųjų vietovių bendruomenių atstovų veiklos analizė*. Vilnius: Tyrimas, atliktas vykdant Viešojo administravimo plėtros iki 2010 m. strategijos įgyvendinimo 2005–2006 m. priemonių plano, patvirtinto Lietuvos Respublikos Vyriausybės 2005 m. vasario 21 d. nutarimu Nr. 197, 3.3.1 priemonę.

Table 26.6 Tax return sources of municipalities

Tax return	Non-tax income	Grants
Part of citizens' income taxes	Income from property	General grants
Property taxes: land tax, real estate tax of enterprises and organizations, inherited property tax	State charges Local charges	Grants for the equalization of tax return Special target grants
Stamp-duty	Income from fines and confiscation Other non-tax income	Other grants

Source: Gedutis 2005: 49.

In 2000, local taxes and the 'divided' income tax of natural persons constituted 89.6 per cent of municipal revenue, but, in 2004, this was down to 42.2 per cent. The decrease is related to the introduction of the pupil budget,<sup>6</sup> which is administered by the Ministry of Finances.

The development of the democratic process on the local level is partly blocked by the ten counties created in 1995. These are higher administrative units of central government at the meso-level. They were established to deconcentrate central government functions from ministries. Unfortunately, this was not implemented, one of the main reasons being that the ministries did not wish to cede their functions to the counties, so counties started to execute some functions of self-government instead. There is, therefore, a constant political discussion about reorganizing the counties, either to abolish them or to reduce their numbers, and these discussions become more active before elections. In 2000, a law on setting up indirectly elected regions was passed, according to which all municipalities of a county form a region. The regions have the same territory as the counties. A region's highest authority is the regional council that consists of the mayors of the municipalities, members of councils of the municipalities, and the county governor. These regions have no resources of their own. Hence, for practical reasons, the regional councils have elected the county governors as the head of the council, as these have access to administrative resources. Unfortunately, in this way central government administers the regional representative government, and this is a breach of democracy and the principle of the separation of powers.

<sup>6</sup> The pupil budget is a sum of money, allocated for education of one pupil per year, with regard to the pupil's age and school type.

## The role of political parties in safeguarding democracy

The experience of party democracy during the inter-war period in Lithuania (1918–40) was an important factor when the modern party system was formed after the re-establishment of independence. Many party organizations were newly created or re-established, the pattern of relations between position and opposition was defined, and the most important legal provisions that regulated activities of parties were adopted. The first parties to be re-established in 1988–90 were those that had existed in the inter-war period (the 'traditional' parties). Important amendments of the law on political parties were passed in 1994, seeking to distinguish between political parties and social groups. Many social groups chose the status of political parties, and the approaching parliamentary elections stimulated the establishment of new political parties, which led to the formation of many parties between 1994 and 1996. This was accompanied by some worrying developments. Although political parties sought to clarify their ideological positions, they were unable to maintain stable relations with the electorate. Electors easily changed their party preferences and strong electoral fluctuations were manifested during elections. The number of political parties increased again before the parliamentary elections in 2000. However, this time the new parties tended to emerge from splits of existing parties. The number of parties also increased in 2000–2 in the local elections.

At the local level, multi-party systems that had no party in a dominating position had been formed from 1995, when the system of proportional representation was used for the first time. However, it was only after the 2000 parliamentary elections that this also held true at the national level, which means that two different types of party systems existed in parallel from 1995 till 2000. Such asymmetry of the party system induced political instability and showed how the system was incomplete. However, after the 2001–3 parliamentary elections, different tendencies became apparent in the party system. Many parties coordinated their actions and programme documents, and some parties unified. Although the entrenchment of democracy in Lithuania is undisputed, one of its most important backbones—parties and a multi-party system—is still developing (Krupavičius and Lukošaitis 2004).

So what determines the choices of the Lithuanian electors? According to data from the Market and Opinion Research Centre *Vilmorus*, most electors choose a party on the basis of its leader; the second motive of choice is the politicians on the list; and the importance of political programmes is in third place. Promises to improve the quality of life come next, followed by gifts received during the election campaign.

A decreasing number of citizens belong to political parties. In 1990, 7.4 per cent of the electorate participated in party activities (at the time there were only five parties). Although there have gradually become more political parties, the number of party members has decreased, and has been about 2 per cent since 1999. A greater

**Table 26.7** Number of registered political parties

Year	1990	1996	2000	2004	2007	2008
Registered parties	5	20	24	40	38	41

*Source:* Central Electoral Commission of the Republic of Lithuania.

choice of parties does not seem to inspire more people to participate. There is also a tendency for people who previously were active in parties to become passive. One reason is that negative associations with parties remain from the Soviet times when people who belonged to the Communist Party were assiduous supporters of the occupying regime. Other reasons are disillusionment with parties, disbelief in the ability to influence decisions through participation in party activities, the lack of party democracy, and party isolation.

Local referendums are regulated by the Law on Local Self-Government. Those who may vote for municipal councils are also allowed to participate in local referendums. These can be initiated by either 10 per cent of the electorate or one-fourth of the council members. However, the council makes the final decision on how the referendums should be carried out and the results are only advisory. Referendums are not popular in Lithuania and are rarely used. A few referendums were held in 2007 in order to find out citizens' opinions on the establishment of new municipalities. In order to be valid, at least 25 per cent of the electorate has to participate. This was not reached in any of the referendums. In some places, only 2–3 per cent of the electorate expressed their will.

## Non-governmental organizations and civil society

For a long time after independence, two laws regulated social initiatives and informal groups: the Law on Associations and the Law on Public Organizations. Since 2004, only the Law on Associations has regulated the formation, management, activities, restructuring, and termination (reorganization and liquidation) of associations (i.e. public organizations, unions, confederations, alliances, societies, etc.) According to this law, activities of associations are public and an association may be formed by at least three persons who have reached 18 years of age.

After the re-establishment of independence, the process of establishing NGOs became more active, their activity profile became clearer, and their responsibilities and obligations in society increased. Most NGOs tried to acquire resources from local or central government, without defining their aims or presenting activity programmes. It was soon understood that it was impossible to support all non-governmental organizations with taxpayers' funds. As the market economy started to dominate from the early 1990s, an opinion emerged claiming that citizens could



express their will during democratic elections, and that non-governmental organizations were not necessary. There were no strong attitudes in favour of the government cooperating with non-governmental organizations.

A research project carried out in 1988, under the label '50 Non-Governmental Organizations in Lithuania' identified the following problems that characterized the sector: negative attitudes of state officials towards NGOs; imperfection of the laws regulating activities of non-governmental organizations; lack of sponsorship; lack of knowledge, experience, and activity of the managers and employees of the NGOs. Another piece of research on 'Non-Governmental Organizations in Lithuania',<sup>7</sup> carried out in 2002, aimed at identifying the extent to which Lithuanians were aware of NGOs, how they assessed them, what were the attitudes of the citizens towards their financial support, and the attitude towards the role of the state in their regard. The answers show that people are not able to identify exactly which organizations are NGOs and which are not. The non-governmental organization Caritas is mentioned most often. Respondents are convinced that the state does not sufficiently support charitable and socially useful activities. One-third of the citizens would support NGOs if asked to. When asked why they do not participate in activities of NGOs or do not give money to them, most respondents said that they did not have enough resources and time.

Even today, a considerable part of society does not fully comprehend the importance of civil society in a democratic country. But a strengthened NGO sector is beginning to compete with both the state and the profit-seeking sector and is capable of taking over some functions from government institutions (in the areas of social security, sports, organization of cultural projects, informal education, scientific research, crime prevention, etc.), and this should increase their influence in society (Ilgius 1999).

Apart from NGOs, a new form of citizen participation has become noticeably more active recently—the community centres. A community centre is a *de jure* registered organization that operates in a certain territory and is preoccupied with some of the affairs of that territory. Community centres, especially in rural areas, have recently increased in number, and today there are over 1,000 of them registered. Their activities encompass a wide spectrum of community needs. They organize cultural and sports events, events for cleaning the surroundings, leisure activities for children and young people; they look after the rural infrastructure, education of citizens, solution of rural social problems; they represent citizens in governmental institutions, etc.

However, especially in rural areas, community centres confront many difficulties in achieving these aims: there is a lack of volunteers; a lack of experience for preparing requests and projects; a lack of computer and internet skills; and a lack

<sup>7</sup> The two research projects were performed by commission of the Non-Governmental Organizations Information and Support Centre.

of knowledge about how and where to get resources for activities. In addition, the interest of the local populations in the activities of community organizations is not great.

Community organizations are most often supported financially by the municipality, business enterprises, and the local population. A survey of organizations showed that more than 40 per cent of the community organizations have received such support one or several times, but more than half of the respondents were disappointed at the amount of financial support given by the central government and the municipalities, and by the possibilities of receiving sponsorship from NGOs. The organizations expect that an important future source of financing will be the structural funds of the European Union (Gegužienė and Žiliukaitė 2004).

Civil public organizations and local politicians work together in community coalitions, and use municipal funds to stimulate local initiatives. Citizen organizations tend to overestimate their own powers; they adapt to the priorities of funds that provide financial support but often lack the capacity to realize these priorities, and this leads to their limitation and stagnation. On the other hand, local government has a tendency to transfer difficult social problems to civil organizations, but shows inflexibility in cooperation, and there is insufficient involvement of partners in the decision-making process. There is often a lack of a systematic approach, and activities are based on the personal experience of officials or their good will. Consulting mechanisms are not defined, and this leads to ambiguity. Due to these reasons, non-governmental organizations and government institutions do not cooperate well (Šiliauskas 2006).

Studies of the state of the civil society in Lithuania carried out in 2007 (by the Civil Society Institute together with TNS Gallup) showed that the development of an independent civil society was experiencing difficulties because the civil capacity of Lithuanian society was poor. In 2007, the civic empowerment index in Lithuania was 33.9 per cent. The index values on four dimensions: civic activeness of the society, potential civic activeness, conception of personal influence in the state, and conception of risks related to civic activities. Civic activeness of the society was evaluated by questions on how often Lithuanian people take up real action in order to reach common interests. This dimension includes political forms of activeness (participation in activities of political parties, demonstrations, etc.) and community actions or social solidarity (voluntary work, charity). Of all respondents, 45 per cent stated that they had donated money or goods to charity, or had supported people or a community organization in some other way in the past years; 31 per cent stated that they had participated in voluntary works, such as cleaning the environment; 17 per cent had participated in the activities of local communities; 11 per cent stated that they had addressed state institutions and reported law violations. Less than 1 out of 10 citizens participated in other civic activities (activities of public organizations, demonstrations, pickets, strikes, etc.) Hence, the civic activeness of Lithuanians is directed to community activities and social solidarity, but is not

manifested as political participation, and 40 per cent had not participated in any civic activities at all in the past years.

Real as well as potential activeness (attitudes or determination to act in case of important matters) can be seen as indicators of a society's civic empowerment. Research shows that if society were faced with a serious political problem (e.g. that the system of democracy would be destroyed), 61 per cent of the Lithuanians would remain passive spectators. In such a case, only 6 per cent of the people would become active in order to solve the problem. If society faced a serious economic problem (e.g. the government would increase income tax a lot) a bit more, or 10 per cent, would start organizing activities. However, a local problem would most stimulate civic activeness (e.g. installation of a dump near a residential territory). In such a case, 27 per cent of the population say that they would start civic activities.

One of the most important features of the 'health' of a democratic system is the conception of personal influence over the state. Most Lithuanians do not feel that they have any such influence; 57 per cent of the population think that they have no influence over decisions that are important for society. When a 10-point scale was used, the Lithuanians assessed their personal influence in the country at 2.3 points and the influence of other ordinary citizens at 2.9 points. They think that the greatest influence is exercised by MPs (8.3 points), officials (7.7), and the president (7.3). Therefore, citizens believe that politicians and officials have a disproportionate amount of civil empowerment.

Applying Lijphart's (1984) index of pluralism of interest groups shows that such groups are weakly organized in Lithuania. Only a small part of employees, employers, and agriculturalists are members of organizations that seek to represent them; groups compete among themselves; there is no social partnership, so the government does not have worthy social partners.

Trade unions, which may be strong in other countries, are not so popular in Lithuania. After the re-establishment of independence, the number of members of trade unions decreased, and the biggest concern of their management was how to divide the property of the union organizations that was inherited from the communist period. In places where trade unions survived, they involved only employees of the public sector and privatized enterprises. Employees of newly established enterprises remained unorganized. In 2001–2, Lithuania and Estonia were 'anti-record breakers' among the countries of Eastern Europe that joined the EU in 2004. In Lithuania, only 15 per cent of all employees were members of trade unions (and in Estonia, 14 per cent) (Feldman 2006).

At present, trade unions (e.g. the teachers' union) are disunited, there is no experience of cooperation among inter-branch trade unions, and often trade unions are identified with the left-wing political parties. We have to agree with Ost that the tripartite meetings of representatives of the government, employers' associations, and trade unions are more illusory or ceremonial than real because

these meetings are more consultative and demonstrative, and sometimes they seem more like public relations actions of the government, organized before announcing decisions that have already been made (Ost 2000).

## RESPONDING TO THE CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

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### Overcoming the Soviet political heritage

This is the first and the most important challenge that Lithuanian society faced when passing to the stage of creating a democratic system. During the years of occupation, the opposite of a healthy political and public life prevailed when each person's life was very much dependent on the state. Central government and its institutions constricted a person's life.

Such constriction violates the main human rights and is not acceptable with regard to democratic values. But another side of these constrictions is noticed more rarely: a person in such a system gets used to being not independent. The society starts to anticipate and wait for state support and regulation of many areas. Discontent arises if support is not received. So freedom has two sides, and some people do not want to accept one of them—responsibility. This feature of Soviet mentality did not disappear even when Lithuania became a democratic republic. (Degutis 2004)

Research by the European Values Survey in 1999 showed that in that year 43.2 per cent of citizens thought that the state should make more efforts so that each person would be provided for; 46.3 per cent thought that the state should control how moral values were observed; 81.4 per cent thought that the state should ensure work for all willing, etc. As this data shows, the culture of the Soviet political system has not disappeared.

Another important matter related to the forming of the political culture is the post-Soviet political cleavage between 'former Communists' and 'not former Communists'. This cleavage played a significant role in society's fragmentation and persisted until approximately 2000 when new patterns of political collaboration made it less relevant. When the Social Democratic Party, which was mostly associated with the 'former Communists', returned to power for the second time in 2000, it found support in other political formations, such as the Liberals, who were not directly associated with the former Soviet regime. The right-wing party (Homeland Union Lithuanian Conservatives, TS LK), mostly associated with anti-Communism, supported a minority government that was lead by Social Democrats from 2007.

## The links between democratic-political reforms and economic reforms

Lithuania is the only Baltic country that came out of the Soviet times with a strong ex-Communist party—the Lithuanian Work Democratic Party<sup>8</sup> (LDDP). This party managed to return to power in 1992 and ruled Lithuania when the most significant market economy reforms were implemented. One hypothesis is that these ex-Communists are to blame for the relative economic lag of Lithuania. The LDDP government preferred a privatization model where employees had the right to acquire ownership of enterprises through a voucher scheme which meant that the management of these enterprises stayed in the hands of the old managers. They did not receive any real new investments, new capital, or technologies. After privatization, they continued to operate in the old way until they perished under mountains of accumulated debt (Norkus 2008). In the minds of citizens, this had a negative impact on the democratization process that was starting, because it was difficult to comprehend how the parliament, elected by people, and the municipal councils could not control the management of the enterprises which were acting wrongly. Although the government tried to protect property (primarily in the agricultural area) that started to be pri(h)vatized,<sup>9</sup> it turned out to be too difficult and maybe even impossible. After the 1992 parliamentary elections, the LDDP government attached the blame for problems arising in the country to the laws that had been passed by the previous government.

When the right-wing parties, linked with economic reforms, came back to power in 1996, they could not change much, because the process of privatization was running and in some cases already completed. All measures had been carried out according to law, so law enforcement could not stop the process. Hence, incorrectly performed economic reforms were not stopped, and their results had (and still have) effects on how the contemporary democratic process is perceived by the public. This is expressed by the following formula: badly executed reforms means bad government, which means bad democracy. So,

in the case of new democracy in Lithuania it all means that the changes brought by the re-establishment of independence, the entrenchment of democracy, and economic reorganization triggered anaemia in the society—a value crisis that will probably be a long-lasting phenomenon. Another important conclusion is that from the point of view of values the environment of social and economic privation stimulates the domination of materialistic values for a long time in Lithuania. (Degutis 2004).

<sup>8</sup> Later this party was renamed the Social Democratic Party of Lithuania.

<sup>9</sup> A term 'pri(h)vatization' appeared in the privatization process, when it was done fraudulently, and it meant 'to plunder for oneself'.



Nevertheless, some economic reforms eventually started to produce positive results, although in 2000–2, on the threshold of Lithuania's integration into the EU, but also as an effect of the Russian crisis, unemployment rates rose and became approximately twice as large in Lithuania as in the EU as a whole. A situation of constant poverty emerged, in which families became used to relying on social welfare and could not imagine life without it. Young people were hit especially hard, with unemployment rates twice as high as in the rest of the population. The situation of hopelessness made young people emigrate, so in 1990–2006 approximately 360,000 people left Lithuania, almost one-fifth of whom were 25–29 years old.<sup>10</sup>

### **Reforms of law enforcement, criminality, and corruption of a democratic state**

At the start of Lithuanian independence, the main political slogans were democracy, state of law, and legality. This played a big role in the formation of the mentality of the citizens of the young state. The understanding of legality in the minds of people is gradually changing, because the attitude towards the norms of private and public life has been changing. Things that were forbidden during the Soviet times in the private sphere (for example, stealing) were tolerated in the public sphere (it was treated as a minor appropriation of social property). Initiatives of individuals were limited to the public sphere, although at the same time the use of an official position was seen as something natural. Not all of this disappeared after the re-establishment of independence and some problems even became more common, for example, engaging in illegal profitable businesses. In 1999, approximately 20 per cent of respondents approved of illegal businesses and more than 30 per cent of respondents approved of giving bribes.<sup>11</sup>

The quality of the legal system and the law enforcement institutions play an important role when forming legality in a state. After a decade, 58.7 per cent of the citizens of Lithuania evaluated the operation of the legal system negatively, and only approximately 30 per cent thought that it would improve. In 2001, only 16 per cent trusted courts and 26 per cent trusted the police.<sup>12</sup> In 2009, 18.9 per cent trust the courts, but public confidence in the police has increased to 35 per cent (according to the data of the Market and Opinion Research Centre Vilnorus).

<sup>10</sup> Department of Statistics to the Government of the Republic of Lithuania.

<sup>11</sup> Political culture research. Report (2000) Vilnius, Institute of International Relations and Political Science at Vilnius University.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid. footnote 8.

According to the data of the Global Competitiveness Report 2008–9 World Economic Forum, in 2008 Lithuania was in 69th place among the countries of the world with regard to public trust in the financial honesty of politicians, in 67th place for judiciary independence from political influences of members of government, citizens, or firms, and in 64th place for the transparency of government policy-making.

## **The reform of the civil service, in order to adjust it to function in a democratic state**

At the end of the twentieth century, a new ideal appeared in Western countries, emphasizing that the civil service should interact with citizens and stressing the quality of the services that were provided. At the same time, establishing a civil society was also considered in Lithuania. However, it appeared that the traditional bureaucratic model of the civil service prevailed, which was oriented towards the state and served the bureaucratic state and not the citizens. Research<sup>13</sup> has shown that respondents most often associated state officials with protection of relatives and friends in the civil service and with misuse of official positions. However, the civil service was more positively evaluated in 2008 than in 2003, although state officials remain among the least valued professions. The contribution of state officials to the creation of the basics of the democratic state could be better. According to data from the Global Competitiveness Report 2008–9 World Economic Forum (2008), the most problematic factor for doing business in Lithuania, after inflation, is inefficient government bureaucracy. Corruption is in the third place, followed by policy instability and government instability.

When talking about democracy and how it is understood, the crucial voice should be that of Lithuanian citizens. The Lithuanian news agency ELTA and the research company of Lithuania and Great Britain *Baltijos Tyrimai* systematically carry out research on the attitudes of the Lithuanian citizens on the functioning of democracy. The general tendency is positive. In 1999, 70 per cent of Lithuanian citizens were dissatisfied with the functioning of democracy, but this gradually decreased to 55 per cent in 2004, 42 per cent in 2007, and 39 per cent in 2008. Formation of self-awareness among the citizens of the young state of Lithuania is a very difficult process in the period of big changes.

<sup>13</sup> Commissioned by the Civil Service Department under the Ministry of the Interior and carried out in 2008 by Vilmorus and scientists from the Kaunas University of Technology.

## CONCLUSIONS

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The tradition of local democracy and parliamentarism in Lithuania started to form in the Middle Ages, but was interrupted twice by occupations. When the country re-established its independence, first at the beginning and then at the end of the twentieth century, the achievements of the surrounding countries in this area were followed, so for this reason no specific Lithuanian model emerged. The system of democracy at central government level is based on a semi-presidential management model, although many analysts emphasize the dominating role of the parliament. In practice, power is divided, which is necessary for a democratic state.

Lithuania has quite a decentralized law on self-government at the local level, but this is restricted by both a central government unable to develop local self-government, and local politicians who value the economic links with central government and therefore do not resist when their own powers of self-government are being weakened.

The involvement of citizens in the democratic processes is two-sided. On the one hand, there is great indifference with regard to participating in matters of local communities, municipalities, and the state, but on the other hand, citizens are gradually getting involved in the decision-making processes with more weighty actions at the level of local communities.

Therefore, in sum, one can agree with the statement of the Lithuanian professor of sociology, Norkus, that today there is no doubt regarding the establishment of democracy in our country. But this is surely not mature yet, and difficulties arise. Citizens are dissatisfied with the quality of democracy, and not with democracy itself (Norkus 2008).

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