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CHAPTER 3

ORIGIN OF LITHUANIAN NATIONALISM: POWERFUL NEIGHBOURS

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A people which does not know its past is living merely for the time being in the present of the existing generation, and only through knowledge of its history does a nation become truly self-conscious (Harrison, 1948, p. 7).

By 1922 Lithuania was declared an independent democratic republic. On February 16, 1922 the University of Lithuania was re-established in Kaunas and its re-opening coincided with the international recognition of Lithuania. The national use of its language was re-established and the country developed a culture and economy which re-affirmed the centrality and importance of the land and rural life. However, Lithuania could not be immune to the historical, political and cultural events which shaped Europe in the first two decades of the twentieth century. This chapter provides an overview of the phases of the development of the Lithuanian nationalism and its efforts in the attempt to obtain independence and a brief overview of the historical events which influenced its political, economic and cultural development during the period of independence.

For a grounded understanding of the Lithuanian nationalism and its emergence, I have examined the works of the historians of Robert D. Anderson (1991), Albertas Gerutis (1969), E.J. Harrison (1944), Eric Hobsbawm (1990), Miroslaw Hroch (1985), Vytautas Merkys (1994), Antanas Kulakauskas (1996), and Darius Staliunas (1996). For the historical events which were part of the process of independence, the works of Egidijus Aleksandreavičius (1996), Alfonsas Eidintas (1998) Zigmantas Kiaupa (2002, Alfred Erich Senn (1998), and Stanley Vardys (1965, 1978), have been also examined

The three Hroch phases of the history of national movement analysed in Chapter 2 are clearly applicable to the case of Lithuania and its political, national, social and cultural movements of the nineteenth century. The movement for the abolition of serfdom in 1861, the temperance movement of 1858-1864, the uprising of 1863-1864 and the resistance to the ban on the use of the Latin alphabet in the Lithuanian Press from 1864 to 1904, can all be seen as supporting the claim that Lithuania, despite Russification, was in effect a separate nation from both Poland and Russia in feeling, if not in terms of

political reality. Peasants came to have an active role and participation in a national and a social movement for the first time in the history of the country. This demonstrated the ways in which nineteenth century nationalism encapsulated and expressed the growing individual and democratic nature of this historical period.

The first voluntary mass organization, the temperance movement, reached rural Lithuania between 1858 and 1864 (Kiaupa, 2002, pp. 241-242). According to the historian Egidijus Aleksandravičius, Lithuania followed the example of the temperance societies that had been established in British colonised Ireland by the Irish Capuchin priest Theobald Mathew in 1838. The Irish Temperance Movement was concerned with both the abstinence from the use of alcohol and with the influence of the established Anglican Church and English colonial policy (Aleksandravičius, 1991, p. 61).

In 1858, Bishop Motiejus Valančius, promoted the temperance movement in the diocese of Žemaitija and later published a Statute which regulated and established the societies throughout the country. By 1860 the societies in the Kaunas province had 692,000 members (83% of all the Catholics in the province), and those in Vilnius had 429,000 (Kiaupa, 2002, p. 241). These societies were established unofficially and the Czarist authorities regarded them with suspicion. The mass participation of the peasants under the leadership of the Catholic Church was an indication of the peasants' awareness of their social and economic conditions and of their rights in a society where serfdom still existed. Thus, until the abolition of serfdom in 1861, the peasantry joined the movement for improving their social and economic status. After the abolition of the serfdom, their active participation can be attributed to the increasing dissatisfaction with the Czarist regime. The changes in the economic and social conditions that the peasantry expected did not materialize.

According to Kiaupa the peasants were now able to demonstrate that "they were a strong, disciplined force which could think for itself and could not be ignored" (Kiaupa, 2002, pp. 241-243). It was one which had also shown itself to be a potential force for decision-making in the economics if, not future life of the country. Thus, the temperance movement became the most important social movement, able to challenge the Czarist regime, and became a serious economic and social threat to the stability of the regime.

National consciousness in the Lithuanian peasantry was first fostered by its participation with the nobility (which was in agreement with the Poles in the attempt to restore a Lithuanian State with its borders marked as the one before the dissolution of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth in 1772), in the uprising of 1863-1864 which attempted to determine the political future of Lithuania. However, among the leaders of the Lithuanian uprising there was no unanimous consensus. They had on their programme the common issue of the distribution of land to peasants and the re-establishment of Vilnius University. It was the issue of the distribution of land that increased the interest and the participation of a large number of peasants in the uprising. Approximately half of the 66,000 Lithuanians who took part in the uprising were peasants (Aleksandravičius and Kulakauskas, 1996, p.150). Although the uprising failed, it provided a pretext for the Czarist authorities to outlaw the societies, using the allegation of political and anti-government activities. This failure posed a threat to the position of the Polish and Lithuanian nobility and to the political power that was traditionally granted to them. It also signalled the beginning of the internal division of the Lithuanian nobility in favour of the Polish.

On May 18, 1864 the Governor-General Mikhail Muraviev officially banned the societies (Vardys, 1978, p. 13). However, this social movement was an expression of the growing political self-awareness of the peasantry which had been allied closely with the clergy and nobility. Although most of the peasants remained under church control, they shared a strong sense of solidarity and national unity. This was also the last time that the Lithuanian peasantry fought alongside the Poles under the common historic banner (Wandycz, 1993, p.164).

The Language Contest: Lithuanian or Russian

The repression and intensified Russification following the uprising of 1863-1864 forced both Lithuanians and Poles to abandon their political demands. From 1864 the Lithuanian nationalism became a more linguistic nationalism (Eidintas, et al., 1998, p. 12). According to Hobsbawn, “linguistic nationalism was and is essentially about the language of public education and official use” (Hobsbawn, 1990, p. 96). In his theory, Hobsbawn maintains that “linguistic nationalism essentially requires control of a state or at least the winning of official recognition for the language” (Hobsbawn, 1990, p. 110).

From 1863 the free press, and most of the national cultural activities, were suppressed and the use of the Latin alphabet in the Lithuanian Press was banned (Kiaupa, 2002, pp. 250-252). The Lithuanian Catholics, considered politically unreliable, were subject also to an intensified Russification programme through the official press, the schools and the Orthodox Church. Thus, all methods of Russification imposed on Lithuania after the insurrection of 1863 were justified and presented as a natural process to suppress Lithuanian national identity. The Finnish historian, Ea Jansen, argued that since the time of the partitions of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, the Czarist authorities considered the Grand Duchy of Lithuania a Russian province (Jansen, 1994, p. 147). Thus, if removed from the Polish cultural and political influence, it would submit to Russification (Merkys, 1994, p. 6). However, according to Hroch, Russification provided “an impulse towards a more rapid growth in linguistic, and indirectly also national awareness on the part of the Lithuanians, and their differentiation from the Polish ruling class” (Hroch, 1985, p. 95).

The ban on the use of the Latin alphabet within the Lithuanian press was thought to be necessary for the successful implementation of Russification. The Czarist authorities replaced the use of the Latin alphabet publication by insisting that the Lithuanian press use instead the *grazdanka* (Cyrillic Russian alphabet). A total of fifty publications were printed with funds from Czarist authorities (Merkys, 1994, p. 9). However, the Lithuanians refused to accept such publications and the Czarist authorities found it difficult to distribute them, even free of charge. Neither intellectuals nor peasants supported the ban, since it carried the danger of losing access to Lithuanian literature and damage to the written and inherited culture (Kiaupa, 2002, p. 253). As a result, the intellectuals sought to overcome the ban against local publication in the Lithuanian language by organising the printing of books and periodicals in Lithuanian language abroad, in East Prussia (Lithuania Minor) and their distribution in secret.

Merkys estimates that during the period of the ban from 1864 to 1904, approximately 4100 books were published abroad in addition to periodicals (Merkys, 1994, p. 9). In the same years Lithuanian immigrants in the United States published 720 books for distribution in Lithuania. A network of *knygnesiai* (book carriers) smuggled the books throughout the country. From 1889 to 1904, the Czarist police confiscated 390,000 copies of Lithuanian publications. Approximately 3000 people, of whom 79.6% were

peasants, were arrested and charged for possessing and distributing banned publications (Merkys, 1994, p. 200). The penalty for smuggling was exile to Siberia, for a period of four or six years. Thus, the *knygnešiai* (book carriers) became great national heroes (Senn, 1959, p. 9). So important was the dissemination of material published in Lithuanian language, that in 1940, the government of independent Lithuania extended the pensions granted in 1925 to the book carriers in recognition that they had risked their lives in the attempt to maintain Lithuanian language and culture throughout the country (Gerutis, et al., 1969, p. 254).

There was also resistance towards the replacement of the Lithuanian language with Russian language in the schools. The intent of the Russian authorities was to create “an intelligentsia with pro-Russian sentiments [and] to use the school to instil a sense of the Russian state and to make the local population loyal subjects of the empire” (Kiaupa, 2002, pp. 251-252). The 1864 ban on the use of the Lithuanian language in primary schools was largely a fruitless exercise in the rural districts, as “secret Lithuanian schools sprang up and by the end of the nineteenth century, few self-respecting villages or small towns were without one” (Kiaupa, 2002, p. 263). These secret schools were an indication of the growing cultural and national resistance to Russification policies. Based in rural areas, they often shifted location from one farmhouse to another, teaching both adults and children. The student and teacher groups were mainly drawn from the peasantry and their instruction organized for the period after farm work. These schools were an acknowledgment that the national movement had mass support. The Lithuanians were determined to protect and promote their language and culture in ways which confirmed the continuing influence of the past on the future of Lithuania.

The 1897 Russian census indicates that 87.3% of the total population lived in villages and small towns and only 12.7% lived in cities, while of the rural population 58.3% spoke Lithuanian as their primary language (Kiaupa, 2002, p. 258). These statistics show the importance of the secret schools as a way to receive an elementary education and also to promote conscious resistance to Russification among the rural population. Over the next four decades the existence of such schools helped to lay a solid foundation for national revival. The number of participants in the fight against the ban on the use of the Latin alphabet on the Lithuanian press, together with the use of the Lithuanian language and its social fabrics, demonstrate the growing alliance between the Lithuanian

intelligentsia and peasant classes and their separation from the Polish. According to Hroch “the secular intelligentsia stood at the head of the national movement ... [but] the peasants played a greater and greater part in the movement” (Hroch, 1985, p. 94).

As a consequence of the press ban, in 1883, the first Lithuanian language national newspaper *Aušra* (The Dawn) was published in Lithuania Minor (East Prussia) in secret. Edited by Jonas Basanavičius, the newspaper aimed to consolidate the unity of the Lithuanians, to increase national consciousness, and to stop the Polonization of the country (Kiaupa, 2002, pp. 263-265). Basanavičius believed that Lithuanians had, like other nationalities, equal right to freedom of the use of the national language, freedom of the press and the right to teach in their national language in Lithuanian schools. Basanavičius’s supporters maintained that the nation was formed from all social strata and based on equality and encouraged the Polonized Lithuanian nobility to reject the influence of Poland and to return to the Lithuanian nation.

In 1889 the radical newspaper *Varpas* (The Bell), published by Vincas Kudirka, called on Lithuanians to move to urban centres and to engage in trade and industry to develop the economy of the country. The aim of these newspapers was to awaken the national consciousness and to build the need for self government within the ethnic territory. According to Hroch, the birth of the newspaper *Aušra* marked the separation between Lithuanian and Polish intelligentsia and the beginning of the organization of Lithuanian patriots (Hroch, 1985, p. 86).

It can be argued that the Lithuanian-Polish separation and the formation of patriotic organizations in Lithuania appeared earlier. As early as the 1860s Lithuanian intelligentsia participated with the peasantry in a national movement which aimed to protect and preserve the language and the schools. According to Merkys, the past Lithuanian historiography and the present day historians are of the opinion that the Lithuanian national awakening started with the newspaper *Aušra*. However, this argument is challenged by the struggle for a free national press which resulted in the lift of the ban on the press on May 7, 1904 by Czar Nicholas II (Merkys, 1994, p. 396). This clearly was the result of the effective resistance of the Lithuanian population to the Russification policy.

Weakening Russian Control (1905-1914)

At the turn of the twentieth century, ineffective Russian foreign and national policy began to threaten the stability of the Russian Empire. Dissatisfaction spread in other European nations where unrest among the population had started against the Czarist nationalist policy. In Czarist Russia, territories' movements for independence had become strong by the time of the outbreak of the First World War. The aggravated national and international relations at the beginning of the twentieth century in the Russian Empire and the imperialistic policy of the major European state which brought on the First World War, gave rise to aspirations of independence in the small occupied nations of the Russian Empire.

In the early years of the twentieth century changes were noticeable in the national movements in Lithuania. Firstly, Lithuanians began to advocate political demands in addition to their cultural demands. Cultural nationalism in Lithuania thus turned into political nationalism. At that time the idea of an autonomous Lithuanian nation began to be shaped. Therefore, in politics was formulated the concept of national self-determination which led to claims political and cultural autonomy and a right to a separate state.

Secondly, the intelligentsia increasingly was able to bond together all strata of the population in the common struggle for independence and the creation of a modern nation state in Lithuania.

Finally, the people understood that in order to become truly independent, Lithuania first had to acquire its own national, political, economical, social and cultural independence. This project of building a nation state was attainable only with qualified people prepared to lay the foundation of an adequate programme of self-government. The political and cultural Lithuanian programmes of this period, which were affected by the foreign policy of the history of the Lithuanian national movement, can be divided in three phases.

The first phase of the Lithuanian national movement can be placed from 1904 to 1915. In this period the Lithuanian intelligentsia developed a programme of political and

cultural autonomy, and the idea of a national university took shape. Its mechanism was based on three major occurrences.

Firstly, there was the continuation of mass national movements during the revolutionary year of 1905, when the programme for Lithuania's autonomy within the Russian empire was formally advocated. This programme was presented at the Great Vilnius Diet in 1905, where 2000 Lithuanians representing all social classes gathered in Vilnius (Senn, 1966, p. 6). It was the first convention in which the peasants (60% of the participants) and intellectuals (35% of the participants) met together to formulate demands, to be submitted to the Czar (Kiaupa, 2002, pp. 284-285). In their resolutions, the participants expressed the necessity for the autonomy of Lithuania: a Lithuania encompassing all the ethnic territories and with a parliament in Vilnius elected democratically and federally linked to its neighbouring countries. This demand included the need for reforms in regard to land ownership, education and the recognition of the Catholic Church as a state religion (Eidintas, et al., 1998, pp. 19-21).

Secondly, there was the constant demand for a higher education institution, such as University of Vilnius, to ensure a continuity of education in the country. Restoration of the University of Vilnius was claimed as a historic right. The country had had this institution in the past (Staliunas, 1996, p. 97). Historian of nationalism, Robert D. Anderson, claimed that: "The use of the educational system for national integration was a European phenomenon in this period" (Anderson, 1991, pp.114-115). In the case of Lithuania, the re-opening of the University of Vilnius was associated with the needs of the country to have more qualified specialists in different disciplines and areas able to rule Lithuania if it successfully regained its independence. Re-opening of the university was also considered vital for the development and preservation of the Lithuanian intellectual and cultural life.

Finally, there was the re-establishment of the Lithuanian cultural life after the lifting of the ban on the press and on the use of Lithuanian language. This encouraged the establishment of private schools with the teaching being in the Lithuanian language, and the development of cultural organizations and political parties.

The assassination of the Austrian Archduke Francis Ferdinand in Sarajevo in June 1914 hastened the military conflict between the Austrian-Hungarian and German alliance, and the Triple Entente of France, Great Britain and Russia. The hostilities between Russia and Germany had devastating effects on the Lithuanian people living along the moving front of the retreating Russian army. Lithuania became a battlefield and parts of its territory were either destroyed or burnt, forcing the rural population to abandon their farmsteads. The Russian authorities had also begun the deportation of individuals who were considered 'unreliable' into the depths of the Russian territories from areas close to the front, while a number of intellectuals, students, clergymen and public servants fled the country. The Lithuanian Jews were targeted also, with the pretext that in the 1907 elections they had supported the election of Lithuanian representatives to the Russian Duma by forming electoral blocks in the urban areas. The electoral system of the Duma was preferential towards the upper-class. The peasant voters in Lithuania could achieve seats in the Duma only with the vote of the Jewish urban population (Eidintas, et al., pp. 20-21).

By the summer of 1915 the Russians had almost completely retreated from Lithuania and on September 19, 1915 the German army entered Vilnius. The old Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth territories were now occupied by the German and Austrian armies. The Czarist control over this territory, which had lasted from the late eighteenth to the early twentieth century, was coming to an end and a new nation was moving towards the final stages of its independence.

The German Occupation (1915-1918)

The second phase in the history of the Lithuanian national movement was developed over the period from 1914 to 1918, at the time when Lithuania was under German occupation. In this period a programme for independence was formulated and the activities of the Lithuanian intelligentsia first started to bear fruit.

Throughout the war, Germany planned the annexation of Lithuania through a gradual process of colonisation and Germanisation, or through the organisation of formerly independent states. An occupation administration followed by subsequent Germanisation was the strategy adopted by the German authorities. The German occupation lasted three

years. During this time the country was divided into districts: (thirty-four counties and two hundred-thirty rural townships) upon which a policy of Germanization was forced. Freedom of movement and communication between different districts was restricted. Postal correspondence and newspapers published in the Lithuanian language were forbidden, with the exception of the newspaper *Dabartis* (The Present) which was in agreement with the German administration. In 1917, the German authorities did allow the publication of another Lithuanian-language newspaper, the *Lietuvos Aidas* (Echo of Lithuania), albeit under strict censorship.

By the end of 1915, the effort of the Lithuanians to improve their education system was successful. Approximately one thousand primary and secondary schools had been established as well as teachers' training courses, although the new German administration kept the entire Lithuanian educational system under tight control. Compulsory German language classes were introduced. German Lutheran teachers replaced Lithuanian Catholic teachers and no new schools or courses were introduced (Eidintas, et al., 1998, pp. 21-26).

During this period the Lithuanian political parties were divided into two main currents, the Conservatives, which included the *Tautininkai* (Nationalists), and Christian Democrat Parties, and Radical Democrats, which included the Social Democrats and the Democratic Parties. The conservatives, in pleading for Lithuanian autonomy, sought compromise and followed a moderate course. The Radical Democrats instead put forward socialist reforms that sought social, economic and political changes.

Nevertheless, the parties in both streams shared the concept of national self-determination linked to the historical traditions of the Lithuanian state. Their territorial aspirations included the historic ethnic Lithuanian territories of Vilnius, Kaunas, and Suvalki and the Grodno provinces. The legacy of the former Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth was still securely established among the conservatives who placed their hopes in Lithuanian landowners to preserve the traditions of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. Most of the landowners were still gravitating in the Polish cultural orbit. They were not prepared to return completely to their Lithuanian origins since that would not give them any further privileges. The radical democrats on the other hand, considered the Polonized aristocracy as a cultural aspect of the country, not indicative of

ethnic origin and favoured civic integration of Lithuania's ethnic groups on the basis of their loyalty to Lithuania.

In August 1917 the Germans granted to the twenty members of the *Taryba* (Council of Lithuania) led by Antanas Smetona, the right to participate in a conference to discuss the German demands for a Lithuania linked to Germany. This was the first occasion for Lithuanian leaders to gather since the German occupation. The conference was held in Vilnius from September 18 to September 22. Lithuanian representatives announced their programme to establish an independent Lithuania within ethnic territories and the restoration of a national University. The re-opening of the University of Vilnius was not only a political issue to be discussed, but a plan for its re-opening was forged.

The *Taryba* began its work on September 24, 1917 and it was responsible for the political programme of the independent Lithuania. The primary concern was to obtain German recognition of Lithuania as a separate national unit, which Germany eventually recognised on March 23, 1918. On November 2, of the same year a temporary constitution was adopted and a provisional government was formed with Augustinas Valdemaras as Prime Minister. Finally, on April 4, 1919 Antanas Smetona was sworn in as the first president of independent Lithuania. On May 15, 1920 the Constituent Assembly replaced the *Taryba* (State Council of Lithuania) (Eidintas, et al., 1998, pp. 24–30).

Lithuanian nationalism had thus finally succeeded in its struggle for independence. On February 16, 1918, in Vilnius, the Council of Lithuania formulated the Act of Independence. The Statute of Vilnius University was adopted in the State Council on December 5, 1918.

The third and final phase of Lithuanian national movement was from 1918 to 1922 when a programme for a nation state was formulated. The most relevant events in this period were the continuation of mass national movements in the fight for independence against the Germans, the Russians and the Poles in which the idea of the nation state was protected.

When the German western front collapsed, the German army retreated, and Lithuania had to form its own military defence. The Soviet revolutionary government annulled the peace treaty of Brest-Litovsk (1918) which renounced any territorial claim to Lithuania and the Red Army moved towards Lithuania while Vincas Kapsukas formed a provisional communist government that proclaimed Lithuania a Soviet Socialist Republic. The Republic, however, was not recognized by the existing Lithuanian provisional government. On November 22, 1918 Prime Minister Valdemaras declared a general mobilisation to resist the advance of the Red Army. The Russians occupied Vilnius on January 5, 1919 while the Lithuanian government withdrew to Kaunas. In August of 1919 the Lithuanian army forced the Red Army out of the country. On July 12, 1920 the Russians requested an armistice renouncing all claims on the Baltic countries (Latvia, Estonia and Lithuania) and new eastern boundaries for Lithuania were established (Eidintas, et al., 1998, pp. 20-27).

Throughout the years of European military conflict, the collapse of empires and the consequent re-alignments of territories and allegiances, it was difficult for Lithuania to develop a stable independent national identity or existence, situated as it was, between powerful neighbouring states. In late 1920 disputes between Lithuania and Poland over territorial claims intensified and resulted in military confrontation. The military conflict with Poland led to the loss of the capital Vilnius which was occupied by the Poles since April 19, 1919 and a third of the territory that had been assigned to Lithuania by the July 1920 Peace Treaty with Soviet Russia. The city of Kaunas became the provisional capital. On July 27, 1922 the United States recognised Lithuania *de jure* followed by England and France on December 22, 1922 (Eidintas, et al., 1998, pp. 28-31).

It was, however, a depleted Lithuania. Absent from the new nation were a third of its ethnic territories and its traditional capital. In this situation the national movement had two major tasks: to translate a national movement into one capable of ruling and administering the newly independent nation and to maintain the struggle to reclaim the traditional lands and capital which had been lost to Poland.

The three phases in the history of Lithuanian nationalism show some similarities with the three Hroch phases analysed in Chapter 2. Firstly, independence in Lithuania was achieved with the joint efforts of the mass movement of the Lithuanian population and

of the intelligentsia of the country which elaborated a programme of independence and developed the concept of a nation state with the participation of all social strata in the struggle. Secondly, intellectuals demonstrated their political maturity and their ability, together with the rest of the nation, to fight to defend independence and to lay the foundation for the nation state. They succeeded in proving to the other European states that Lithuania, like any other state, had the right to be independent and to achieve recognition both *de facto* and *de jure*. Lastly, the foundation of a national university was conceived as an integral part of the political programme for the building of a nation state.

Declaration of Modern Lithuania's Independence (1920-1939)

The Lithuanian Independence started in rather unfavourable conditions, which were aggravated by the needs of military and, later, diplomatic defence. The twenty-two years of political freedom, however, gave the country's young leaders the opportunity, unique in Lithuanian history, to carry out a program of fundamental social and economic reform (Vardys, et al., 1965, p. 23).

In 1923 Lithuania covered an area of 55,670 square kilometres with a population of 2.17 million of whom approximately 80% were ethnic Lithuanians, 7% were Jewish, 6.8% were Polish, 3.2% were Germans and 2.3% were Russians (Kiaupa, 2002, p. 347). The economy relied heavily on agriculture with 50% of the population making its living from farming as the country was poor in natural resources. As a result the vast majority of the population remained in rural areas despite the migration of approximately 10 % of the population to urban centres throughout the nineteen years from 1920 to 1939 (Vardys, et al., 1965, p. 22). Within this limited context, the *Foundation Seimas* (Constituent Assembly) had to carry out the task of building the new state.

A series of reforms covered all aspects of civil and political life. The major concern was the country's economy and the living conditions of the rural Lithuanian population that had been stifled by 120 years of Czarist rule. The regime had ruled within a conservative land-based system in which the landowners and nobility formed a privileged class holding the rights of land ownership and government. The country's Lithuanian culture had been repressed by a variety of measures, among them the ban on printing in the

Latin alphabet imposed in 1864 and enforced until 1904, and the associated language measures which prohibited education in Lithuanian language (Vardys, et al., 1965, p. 22). This conservative system in which Polonised Lithuanians and absentee Russian landlords controlled the economy, coupled with economic measures which left Lithuanian territories underdeveloped in comparison with other parts of the Russian Empire, had put Lithuania at a disadvantage. The government of independent Lithuania focused on reforms and legislation to address issues of land ownership, education, the use of the language, the role of the Roman Catholic Church and the divisions of the ethnic Lithuanians and Lithuanian Jewish communities.

Land Reform

To return to the question of land reform, I must emphasise and repeat what I have said many times that the author of land reform was not a person but a collective. The whole of Lithuania was that collective, and not only these who earned their living from the land, but also the Lithuanian intelligentsia and craftsmen, all those who wanted to see Lithuania to lessen the poverty among Lithuanians, to change the face of Lithuania. Land Reform is the vox populi, called for by the whole nation. I only had the great honour and fortune to turn it into reality. No truly patriotic Lithuanian could ignore that voice without sinning against his nation and country. ... I as the minister of agriculture, carried out the hopes of the nation and the decision of the expresser of the national will (Mykolas Krupavicius, in Pauliukonis 1970, p. 14).

According to the census of 1923, the Lithuanian population, without the Vilnius and Klaipeda, regions was estimated at 2,028,975 people. Of the total population 15.8 % lived in cities and towns whilst 84.2 % lived in villages and smaller country towns (Eidintas, et al., 1998, p. 45). Before the First World War, the lack of raw materials and the limited supply of skilled technical labour available in the country hindered the establishment of heavy industry and, as a consequence, the economy of Lithuania was forced to rely on specialised industries based on farming products. These conditions continued to influence the government's decisions in the late 1920s to promote dairy and livestock farming. As a result, the national economy continued to be heavily reliant upon agriculture during the period of independence (Vardys, et al., 1965, p. 25).

In 1919, approximately 75 % of the total Lithuanian population was engaged in farming (Kiaupa, 2002, p. 349) notwithstanding that 40 %, of the land was still in the hands of a small group of landowners, with 20 % owned by only 450 families with holdings averaging 490 hectares (Vardys, 1968, p. 23). Peasants' farms (40,000 families) with an average of fifteen hectares covered 25 % of the remaining land while 60,000 families, representing one fifth of the rural population, were landless (Pauliukonis, 1970, p. 1).

The resolution of the issue of land ownership was a priority for the reform programme of the new Lithuanian Government. Indeed, from the first days of independence in 1918, the political parties began to lay the foundation for a land reform and introduced fundamental changes in the re-distribution of land among landless peasants and small landholders. The intent was to improve the national economy, the living conditions of the rural population and to win the support of the majority of the Lithuanian people (Eidintas, 1998, et al., p. 45). The purpose of the land reform was clearly stated in the preamble of the bill:

The land reform bill is being enacted in order to supply the landless and the small holders with land, to regulate the control of land in such a way as to create conditions for the development of agriculture and first of all of small and medium sized farms, and to nationalize that which the state can better use and safeguard than private individuals (Pauliukonis, 1970, p. 6).

During the first months of independence, a number of decrees were passed as an introduction to the Land Reform Bill. The drafting of the land reform was left to the Constituent Assembly under the chairmanship of a Roman Catholic priest Mykolas Krupavičius. On August 14, 1920 the Introductory Land Reform law was promulgated and known as the 'Small Land Reform'. According to this act, the Government acquired the property of forest and timber stands of over sixty-seven acres, swamps and peatbogs, rivers, lakes, natural resources and mineral water sources larger than seventy hectares (Gerutis, et al., 1969, p. 200). In addition, entailed estates, properties of the former Russian state, estates of absentee Russian landowners and the most neglected land became part of the Lithuanian Government acquisition (Eidintas, et al., 1998, p. 45).

The main Land Reform Act was passed on April 3, 1922 under Krupavičius who became the Minister of Agriculture. A State Land Fund was established to assume ownership and to redistribute the land acquired by the Lithuanian Government among landless

peasants, small landholders, labourers, artisans, schools, hospitals, towns and parishes. Army volunteers were given priority in the redistribution of land and repayments to the State Land Fund were not immediately required (Eidintas, et al., 1998, pp. 45-47). Furthermore, army volunteers were given timber grants for building purposes (Rutter, 1926, pp. 49-50). Peasants who had been given land were to repay the government over a period of thirty-six years beginning in the ninth year from the date of the concession of the land. The landowners and the holdings of the monasteries and churches were to be compensated for their expropriated lands over the same period. The compensation was determined by law on the value of the land from 1910 to 1914. As a result the land value was denoted in currencies that were later debased by inflation. Forest grants and debt write-offs were a form of compensation as well as the cash payments. This payment in devalued currencies meant that landlords received significantly less than the market value of their land for compensation payments as well as being left with no more than eighty hectares of land each. The number of landowners grew by 18% whilst another 13% of Lithuanian peasants added to their holdings. On average new farmers received 9.4 hectares and small landowners 2.5 hectares. Most of this land was distributed from 1923 to 1926 and the small size of the majority of the holdings would become an important issue in a country which was to rely on agriculture to generate export income as well as to maintain its social fabric (Eidintas, et al., 1998, p. 46).

Eidintas asserts that land reform was necessary and made good economic sense. Prior to the reform about 60% of Lithuanian peasants still lived in hamlets and not on individual farmsteads. This impaired the growth and prosperity of Lithuanian agriculture. Eidintas stresses that in those areas of Lithuania where individual farmsteads prospered, agricultural productivity was relatively high. In Suvalkija, a region in South Western Lithuania where almost all peasants were living on individual farmsteads, the productivity in livestock, poultry breeding and grain was much higher than that of the larger estates. In comparison to the rest of Lithuania this region was the most productive. This was in contrast to the central regions of the country where only half of the rural populations lived on farmsteads and the agricultural productivity was lower; while in eastern regions the productivity was even lower as the majority of peasants worked on estates as hired labourers (Eidintas, et al., 1998, p. 47). The re-distribution and ownership of land and the conversion of hamlets into individual farmsteads encouraged, for the first time, independence in the peasants and sense of initiative in methods of

farming, and eliminated unproductive strips of land on the edges of some villages that had impeded the introduction of crop rotation (Pauliukonis, 1970, p. 6).

Eidintas argues that the land reform was seen by the Lithuanian Government as a continuation and further development of the Land Reform introduced by Pyotr Stolypin (Russian Minister of Agriculture) in Russia at the turn of the twentieth century aimed to create individual landowners. In addition, this reform also sought to increase the number of medium and small holdings but at the economic cost of the size and productivity of the larger estates (Eidintas, et al., 1998, p. 48). As such, the programme conformed to the conservative politics of a predominantly Roman Catholic Lithuanian Government. The redistribution of land continued to be a marker of national pride and achievement and was a continuation of Lithuanian rural national identity.

Former landowners received compensation as their economic power was reduced while peasants who had been granted land were often unable to establish themselves despite loans and subsidies from the state. These two circumstances had an impact on the economy of the country, which resulted in a gradual migration of the peasants from rural to industrial urban areas (Eidintas, et al., 1998, p. 47). Despite this trend and the fact that the Lithuanian economy was not immune to the repercussions of the world economic crisis of 1929-1932, the redistribution of land resulted in an agricultural economy able to sustain a new class of farmers holding small and medium sized farms. By 1930 approximately 6% of Lithuanian territory belonged to 1,602 landlords and new farmers. Peasants from ten to twelve hectare farms (92,808 peasants) owned 30% of the land which constituted 32.3% of all farming land. While peasants with farms from thirty to hundred hectares (27,073 peasants) owned 27.5% of land which comprised 9.4% of the remaining farming land. Lithuanian agriculture, however, still employed 150,000 hired labourers (Eidintas, et al., 1998, pp. 116-120). Although the land was in small holdings, it enabled the majority of peasants and the nation to survive the economic crisis, while at the same time achieving a key objective of the national movement.

The adoption of modern methods of farming and the introduction of higher yield strains also led to an increase in productivity while peasants gradually shifted from grain production to dairy and farming products. Livestock breeding was given special consideration and by 1932 the high standard in stock breeding improved the quality of

dairy products. The establishment of dairy industries as “ the government promoted the transition from grain culture to stockbreeding and dairy farming, based upon large-scale co-operatives whose initiative and enterprise stimulated the expansion of foreign trade” (Harrison, 1948, p. 13). The first sugar factory was built in Marijampole in 1932 and a *Pienocentras* (dairy factory) was established in 1926, holding a virtual monopoly of exports of dairy products and eggs. These new agricultural patterns of production resulted in an increase in the income of wage earners and improved the young nation’s export earning capacity, while still keeping faith with the nationalist ideology of a modern state based on traditional, rural and ethnic Lithuanian ideals and structures of organization (Eidintas, et al., 1998, p. 117).

Lithuania remained a predominantly agricultural country, where industry and towns grew slowly. Kiaupa maintains that The Great Depression, which engulfed the world economy in 1930, had serious negative repercussions on Lithuanian agriculture, which still accounted for 70% of national production. Owners of small farm holdings went bankrupt and there was consequently heavy unemployment (Kiaupa, 2002, p. 356). His argument ignores the nationalist political imperative behind these reforms. The argument needs to include more than economics in considering Lithuanian land reform. Eidintas indeed, argues that although the Lithuanian economy clearly suffered from the effects of The Great Depression, the “land reform had laid a solid foundation not only for Lithuanian agriculture, but for the rest of the economy, and for the state in general” (Eidintas, et al., 1998, pp. 48-49). The land reform had brought land into active production which had been previously part of the large estates often controlled by absentee landlords. It also gave a valued national identity and place in Lithuanian society to the peasants who had been so important in the nationalist and reform movements of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Land reform of this nature was a national and cultural necessity as stated by Rev. M. Krupavičius (Pauliukonis, 1970, p. 3).

Currency Reform

A new Lithuanian currency was an important part of the process of national renewal and economic reform. Lithuanian independence occurred in 1920 and its first years were marked by a continued dependence on the Czarist and Duma roubles and the German mark, both heavily devalued currencies. This position meant that Lithuania indirectly

supported German reparations to the Allies after the First World War and put even more pressure on the new nation's economy. As a result of the instability, Lithuania received very little aid from the Western powers. Instead its major source of aid came from Lithuanian Americans who paid \$1.9 million for Lithuanian Liberty loan bonds continuing the pattern began earlier by Lithuanian Americans who had sent books to Lithuania during the period of the ban on Lithuanian publication in Lithuanian language (Eidintas, et al., 1998, p. 41).

The introduction of its own currency, the *litas* (based on the gold standard of August 16, 1922, worth 0.15 of 426g of pure gold), was an important step in Lithuanian cultural and economic independence. In the years from 1922 to 1938 the *litas* was regarded as one of the most stable of the European currencies (Eidintas, et al., 1998, pp. 49-51). The American dollar was established as the standard (US\$1 equal to 6 *litas*). The right to issue currency was given to *Lietuvos Bankas* (Bank of Lithuania). The *litas* kept its value until the first Soviet occupation (Gerutis, et al., 1969, p. 202). Lithuania distributed paper and metal currency. Coins in denominations of one, two, five, ten, twenty and fifty cents were minted using bronze; but one, two, five and ten *litas* coins were minted in silver. Banknotes were distributed in denominations of ten, twenty, fifty and hundred *litas*. At first the coins were minted in England then in 1939 a State mint was established in the city of Kaunas (Bindokienė, 1989, p. 100).

Education Reform

First feeling the need to speak and write Lithuanian and then dreaming of possible independence (Basanavičius, in Eidintas, et al., 1998, p. 5).

During the period of independence the Lithuanian Government fostered and encouraged the establishment of a system of public education aimed at developing, in the words of Eidintas, “the country's spiritual and material culture” (Eidintas, et al., 1998, p. 129), which had been severely hindered by 120 years of Russification policies imposed by the Czarist regime (Kiaupa, 2002, pp. 250-252). The Smetona government fostered the development of the economic, cultural and the scientific life of the country through a network of schools and universities, the establishment of the Institute of Arts and the Conservatory of Music, both founded in 1935.

Under Russian rule, attendance to primary school education was not compulsory. This resulted in a high number of illiterate and semi-literate people (Gerutis, et al., 1969, p. 250). After 1922 this number decreased as a Primary Schools Law was passed making primary school attendance compulsory for children between seven and fourteen years of age (Gerutis, et al., 1969, p. 215). Children were required to attend primary school for a minimum of six years instead of the previously required four years.

In Lithuania in 1919 there were 1036 primary schools with an attendance of 45,540 children. By 1938, the number of schools had reached 2,319 with 5,110 teachers (Eidintas, et al., 1998, p. 129); primary schools alone accounted for 283,773 children (Gerutis, et al., 1969, p. 250). Furthermore, minority language schools were maintained for Lithuanian Jews, and for Polish, Russian, German and Latvian minorities. Secondary education provisions increased by thirty-one public schools and twenty-nine private gymnasiums, with a combined population of approximately 18,000 students (Eidintas, et al., 1998, p. 129).

After 1925 secondary public schools, in which Latin was not taught, required two compulsory foreign languages, German and either French, English or Russian. When the programme of a six-year minimum primary education was introduced in 1936, French replaced German as a foreign language “in part because of the deteriorating relations with Germany” and Eidintas further added that the study of compulsory foreign languages also made possible “a closer acquaintance with the standards of higher education in other parts of Europe” (Eidintas, et al., 1998, p. 130). Eidintas emphasises that the study of compulsory foreign languages also was important in fostering the sense that the newly independent Lithuania was indeed a part of the Western European culture. In October 1919 a programme of higher education was established in Kaunas and by 1922 had evolved into the University of Lithuania. The University of Vilnius, closed in May of 1832 by Russian authorities, could not be restored after Vilnius was seized by the Poles.

The Church during the Period of Independence

The [Roman Catholic] Church's traditions and customs were part of the folkways; its moral code dominated public opinion. At the end of the nineteenth century, the Church ... and its clergy provided much of the leadership of the movement for independence and, afterward, for radical social reforms ... during the period of independence, the Church became indissolubly wedded to Lithuanian nationalism (Vardys, et al., 1965, pp. 29-30).

Article 14 of the Lithuanian Constitution of August 1, 1922 proclaimed the right of the Lithuanian people to “equality before the law, inviolability of person and property, freedom of religion and conscience, freedom of correspondence, word and press” (Gerutis, 1968, p. 198). The Constitution was passed by the *‘Lietuvos Krikščionių Demokratų Partija’* or LKDP (Christian Democratic Party) the largest and the most influential party in the country and whose members and parliamentary representatives were drawn largely from the Roman Catholic clergy and community, with the support of Jewish minority representatives (Vardys, 1978, p. 21). Thus, from its very beginning the influence of the Catholic Church on independent Lithuania was significant as the Church itself was a key element in nationalist and legislative politics.

The Christian Democratic Party directed their intention on “stressing the role of the Catholic Church in the national life of Lithuanians [and] vigorously pressed for the religious rights of the faithful” (Eidintas, et al., 1998, pp. 40-41). Members of the party had fought for the development and use of the Lithuanian language and the clergy, among the supporters, had provided leadership for the movement for independence, instilling nationalist ideas in their congregations. Furthermore, the party was anti-Polish, still resenting the historical “Polonising influences of the Polish clergy in Lithuania” (Eidintas, et al., 1998, p. 41).

After independence the Christian Democratic demanded that Catholicism be recognized as the State national religion. Although this demand failed, clearly Lithuania's first permanent constitution was favourable to religion and protected the traditional position of the Catholic Church. The rights granted to the Catholic Church under Article 84 were also guaranteed to all religious denominations, the right to self-government, to perform

services, organize schools and charitable institutions, and to establish monasteries on their own property. Furthermore, Articles 83-87 granted churches exclusive jurisdiction over marriage laws and religious birth and death certificates. The Lithuanian government kept no such records. Through these powers granted to the Churches, the State surrendered sovereignty over significant aspects of Lithuanian life and society (Vardys, 1978, pp. 22-23).

The religious influence over Lithuanian life was further consolidated through the provisions of Article 80 which regulated the teaching of religion in schools. The article stated that “religious education [was] obligatory with the exception of schools established for children whose parents do not belong to any religious organization” (Vardys, 1978, pp. 22-23). Thus, the state equally supported, in financial terms, teaching of the Catholic as well as the Protestant and Jewish religions in public and minority ethnic primary and secondary schools. However, Catholicism was considered the dominant national religion. Similarly, the state supported a Catholic theological-philosophical school and a Department of Protestant Theology at the University of Kaunas.

The articles involving the compulsory teaching of religion in schools and the recognition of only religious marriages became the object of controversial debates as Leftist parties protested against the compulsory aspect of the teaching and the lack of recognition of civil marriage and divorce. In 1927 relations between the Catholic Church and the State were further defined by a Concordat with the Holy See which gave the Church still more control over education and freedom of the Catholic Action Organizations (Vardys, 1978, pp. 27-29). This agreement also provided financial support for the seminaries, salaries of the clergy and partial compensation for church properties seized by the Czarist government (Savasis, 1966, p. 14).

The Constitution of independent Lithuania conferred equal rights on and protection to all religious denominations. In practice, the constitutional provisions and laws in favour of religion worked to strengthen the position of the Catholic Church, already strong from its economic independence due to land ownership, and its closeness to the religious congregations. Vardys argues that the Church’s landed property was not large, with churches and monasteries, churchyards, rectories, orphanages and other social

institutions comprising only about 20,000 hectares of land, approximately 1.5 % of total arable land of the country (Vardys, 1978, p. 33). While perhaps not large, this ownership was conspicuous. Most of the farms were well managed and their usefulness was argued on the grounds that without them it would be difficult to support the priests.

The Catholic Church was supported by 85% of the Lithuanian population. Catholic societies and organizations attracted various age groups. By 1939 the rural youth group *Pavasaris* (Spring) alone had 90,000 members (Vardys, 1978, p. 32), the children's organization, *Angelas Sargas* numbered 60,000, the Catholic Women's Society, numbered 42,000, the *Ateitininkai*, an organization of high school, college and university students with graduates numbered about 12,500, and there were 1500 Catholic teachers, making a total of 106,000 out of a population of 1,898,000 (Savasis, 1966, p. 14).

Catholic publications had the largest circulation in the country. By 1931 the St. Casimir Society, founded in 1906, had published 530 books in 2,294,000 copies. In the following years of independence the number of Catholic newspapers and publishers increased due to the work of the Marian Fathers, the Jesuits and the Franciscan Brothers (Savasis, 1966, p. 14). Furthermore, Catholic intellectuals and the clergy involved themselves in the publication of journals and magazines, which helped to build the bridge between politically different segments of the society. The growing weight of church organizations, their involvement in the nation's cultural, educational and political life and the vigour of the new secular and clerical leadership, kept the Church close to the Lithuanian population.

This situation was not accepted by the socialists and younger generation of nationalists who opposed the Church's control over political and secular life, particularly its control of education. They tried unsuccessfully to fight that power and influence through a programme of atheistic education that attempted to secularise Lithuanian life and through the removal of financial support for private schools (Vardys, 1978, p. 23).

Equally fruitless were the efforts of the authoritarian regime of Antanas Smetona to curb the Catholic Church's influence by banning and restraining Catholic organizations and by restricting the work of the Catholic theological-philosophical school. The Catholic Church during the period of independence was too closely identified with Lithuanian

nationalism, as the majority of the clergy including its senior hierarchy, had already supported the nationalist movement before the First World War. Instead, the Church opposed any form of authoritarianism imposed by the Smetona regime. Indeed it has been argued that the Church was able “to contain the regime from swerving to extremism and to Fascism” (Vardys, 1978, pp. 30-34). So extensive was the Catholic influence in the country that in 1939 Pope Pius XII, accepting the credentials of Stasys Girdvainis, the new Lithuanian diplomatic representative to the Holy See, called Lithuania “a frontline fortress of the Catholic faith in northern Europe” (Savasis, 1965, p. 15).

The Lithuanian Jewish Community

The Egyptians were not Aryans, yet no one can deny their great culture. The Japanese are a yellow-skinned race, yet their power today is undeniable, and their culture is exceptional. The Jews are Semites... and how great their impact has been on mankind. They gave us the bible (Smetona, in Eidintas, et al., 1998, pp. 135-136).

By the 1930s the shape of the Lithuanian state in which traditional religious and social values were given priority had been defined. The nation was now able to conduct its own cultural, economic and political life. By the late 1930s Lithuanians began to perceive a full national life within the framework of a now established and independent Lithuania incorporating minority groups.

In the year of independence the Jews of Lithuania were the largest ethnic minority in the country. The census of 1923 recorded a population of 154,000 Lithuanian Jews, representing 7.6% of the total population. They were mainly concentrated in cities and towns and engaged in business and trade (Eidintas, et al., 1998, p. 133). Jews who had previously settled in urban areas by Czarist Regulation for Jews of 1804 had to confront the new government policy to increase the presence of ethnic Lithuanians in commerce, industry and professional life while maintaining their traditional domination in agriculture. These policy decisions meant that ethnic and Jewish Lithuanians would find themselves increasingly in competition in an historical period in which the racialization of Jews was a defining component of European politics.

In Lithuania, Jewish communities appeared as early as the fourteenth century with well established communities throughout the country from the second half of the sixteenth century. In 1766, approximately 157,000 Jews were living in Lithuania, mostly settled in cities and towns. In the eighteenth century it was common for more than half of the population of a small town to be Jewish and this pattern as stated above was reinforced by the Czarist *Regulations for Jews*, of 1804 which compelled Jews to live in towns and cities in order to strengthen the economic base of the urban centre (Kiaupa, 2002, p. 228). The even harsher regulation of 1882 had forbidden the Jews from living in rural areas or working in farming (Kiaupa, 2002, p. 228). Thus, while the Jews were concentrated in urban centres and occupations, Lithuania remained a predominantly agricultural country for the entire nineteenth century.

The Russian census of 1897 indicates that of the 300,000 Lithuanian Jews living in the country, 212,600 established themselves in the Kaunas Province (13.7% of all the residents of the area); of these people, 43.4 % lived in the cities, 53.8% in towns and 2.8% in villages. At the end of the nineteenth century the separation of ethnic and Jewish Lithuanians into predominantly rural and urban areas, was paralleled to the work categories in which they were associated (Eidintas, 2002, pp. 27-28).

During the first years of independence two Jewish Organizations were established: the Official Ministry for Jewish affairs and the Jewish National Council. Both regulated the cultural, religious and social welfare of the Jewish community. By 1925 a network of Yiddish and Hebrew language schools was also operating throughout the country. It educated 93% of Lithuanian Jewish children and contributed to the preservation of the cultural and social life of Lithuanian Jews. Vilnius became the centre for the publishing of Hebrew language textbooks (Steinhardt and Botwinick, 2004, p. 33).

Jews also participated in the political life of Lithuania, as members of the Independence Volunteer fighters and later volunteering for the newly created Lithuanian army. The first provisional Lithuanian Government recognised the contribution made by the Jewish minority in securing independence, by appointing Jacob Wygodski as the Minister for Jewish affairs and by inviting Jewish representatives to join the *Lietuvos Taryba* (Lithuanian Parliament) in November 1918. However, new political circumstances prevented these positions from lasting more than a few years and by 1924 the Ministry

for Jewish Affairs and the Jewish National Council were dissolved by the government which considered them ‘unnecessary’. In spite of these measures, the Jewish religious community continued to be subsidised by the government and was able to retain the freedom to run its social, religious and educational affairs (Eidintas, et al., 1998, p. 134).

At the same time the concept of the newly established nation state as one in which the national language and ethnic Lithuanians would be central, influenced Lithuanian policy across areas of business, economic policy and education. This new strategy generated friction between the ethnic Lithuanian and Jewish communities. The government continued to support agriculture, while striving to create a new urban Lithuanian managerial and professional class. The large or medium sized industrial enterprises were allowed to organize themselves, as they were, “after all ... not owned by ethnic Lithuanians but were owned by German and Jewish industrialists” (Eidintas, et al., 1998, p. 119). The medium sized industrial enterprises were not supported by the Government as the country was still focused on a systematic development of agricultural industries dominated by ethnic Lithuanian firms. Domas Cesevičius, the Secretary-General of the *Tautininkai* party stated:

The economy would only be national and Lithuanian only when agricultural industries led by [ethnic] Lithuanians would grow to such an extent that they would naturally dominate non-agricultural, i.e. non [ethnic] Lithuanian industries (Cesevičius, in Eidintas, et al., 1998, p. 119).

After independence ethnic Lithuanians also began to increase their participation in higher education which had been traditionally an area of Jewish endeavour. The policy adopted by the Lithuanian government, in the early years of independence, to institutionalise the use of the Lithuanian language in public life, commerce and state education represented a challenge for the Lithuanian Jewish community. They were accustomed to speaking Russian or Polish and had a limited knowledge of the Lithuanian language. As part of this policy the Smetona government introduced a Lithuanian language entrance examination which effectively reduced the number of Jewish students attending higher education institutions. Such provision could only undermine the relations between ethnic and Jewish Lithuanians and make clear that the position of Jewish Lithuanians within the new state was one which both groups would have to confront and resolve. Jewish community leaders responded to the government’s

efforts to promote Lithuanian nationalism through language and suggested to the members of their communities that they refrain from using the Russian language in public or in business, particularly as ethnic Lithuanians perceived Jewish difficulties in speaking Lithuanian in these early days as “an indication of disloyalty to the Lithuanian State” (Eidintas, et al., 1998, p. 135).

Although divisions and difficulties were surfacing and perceived by both ethnic and Jewish Lithuanians, nationalist sentiment, and business and professional competition, rather than religious beliefs, formed the basis of the problems. Because the Lithuanian Jewish community played an important role in the country’s economy, displays of intolerance based on religious creed which could lead to anti-Semitism, did not occur as strongly in Lithuania as they did in other European countries. “Indeed Jewish educational, cultural and religious life thrived [and by] the standards of the time, the situation of Lithuanian Jews was relatively good” (Eidintas, et al., 1998, pp. 133-136). Smetona’s independent Government strove to maintain these favourable conditions and in the mid 1930s the Smetona regime “spoke out against increasing anti-Semitic rhetoric” (Eidintas, et al., 1998, pp. 133-137).

Furthermore, the Lithuanian minister of National Defence, Balys Giedraitis, issued a decree in 1939 reinforcing the government stance, that all persons fomenting anti-Jewish activity be punished. In 1935 Smetona stressed that “Lithuania’s ethnic minorities were not foreigners, but fellow citizens; they belonged to the Lithuanian nation, although their ethnic backgrounds might be different [and] gave public assurance that minority cultures would always be respected” (Smetona, in Eidintas, et al., 1998, pp. 133-136). However as well-meaning and sincere as these sentiments may have been, the outbreak of WWII and the arrival of Soviet and Nazi-German occupying forces would soon demonstrate the inability of the new Lithuanian State to survive and to protect the Jewish Lithuanian minority.

Conclusion

Due to its geographic position between German, Polish and Russian territories, Lithuania’s history was shaped, after the period of the Grand Dukes, by the contests between these neighbouring countries. The fight for its own national independence and

identity was sustained by national movements, whose key characteristics were a focus on land and language, the repossession of which was necessary for the creation of an independent state based on the concept of the restoration and continuity of the Grand Duchy. The goal, once achieved, lasted only two decades.

The next chapter explores the effects of the Nazi and Soviet occupations and the resistance to these authoritarian regimes which affected the ethnic and Jewish Lithuanian populations, stifling the open expression and development of the Lithuanian culture and economy.