Republic of Lithuania Country Report

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Executive Summary:

With its long history of nationhood, including two decades of independence prior to forced annexation by the Soviet Union in 1940, Lithuania's transition from Soviet rule to a new European identity was comparatively fast. Aided by the relatively small size of its ethnic Russian minority, which has helped keep internal tensions low, Lithuania joined the European Union and NATO in 2004, meeting a key post-independence goal. After a rocky start in the 1990s, Lithuania's economy has reoriented toward the West and was growing quickly until the recent global financial crisis. Lithuania's closest ties are to its Baltic neighbors, the EU, and Russia.

Jewish history in Lithuania is long and notable. Vilnius (formerly Vilna) was once a famous center of European Jewry (known as "the Northern Jerusalem"), but the present Jewish community is a fraction of its pre-war size. Ongoing issues of concern between the Lithuanian government and the Jewish community include stalled progress on communal restitution, the possible destruction of the Snipiskes Jewish cemetery in Vilnius, and the investigation of several elderly World War II Jewish partisans.

History:

Lithuania, slightly larger than West Virginia, borders Latvia, Belarus, Poland, the Kaliningrad oblast of the Russian Federation, and the Baltic Sea. The medieval Grand Duchy of Lithuania was a large and powerful state, fighting off German knights and, in commonwealth with Poland, once dominating the region between the Black and Baltic Seas. During the partitions of Poland in the late 18th century, Lithuania was divided between Russia and Prussia. After more than a century of rule by Russian Tsars, who suppressed several revolts and imposed Russification policies, Lithuania declared its independence in February 1918. This lasted until 1940, when the Soviet Union forcibly incorporated Lithuania. The United States never recognized the Soviet annexation of Lithuania.

The brutal Soviet occupation, in which thousands of Lithuanians were deported, executed, or exiled, caused many Lithuanians to welcome and collaborate with invading German troops in 1941. Some Lithuanians fought with the Germans against the Russians in hopes of gaining national independence; others participated in the Holocaust under Nazi occupation, which destroyed over 90% of Lithuania's sizable Jewish community. The anti-Nazi resistance in Lithuania was

Statistics:

Population: 2,884,433 (July 2015 est.)
Size: 65,200 sq. km

Capital: Vilnius (Vilna)
Major cities: Vilnius, Kaunas (Kovno), Klaipeda, Siauliai, Penevezys (Ponevitch)

Jewish population: 5,000 (est.)

Head of State: Dalia Grybauskaitė
Head of Government: Prime Minister Algirdas Butkevičius
Foreign Minister: Linas Linkevičius

**Ambassador to United States**: Rolandas Kriščiūnas

U.S. Ambassador to Lithuania: Deborah A. McCarthy

Freedom House Rating: Free

the strongest of all such Baltic movements, and included Jewish partisan units; Israel has recognized 513 Lithuanians as "Righteous Among the Nations" for risking their lives to save Jews during the Holocaust.

After World War II, Lithuania's society and economy were reorganized along Soviet lines, including postwar purges, deportations and imprisonment of 100,000 or more Lithuanians.

Gorbachev's national reforms allowed the formation of the popular "Sajudis" reform movement in Lithuania in 1988, which proved instrumental in Lithuania's push for greater democratic and national rights. After the Lithuanian Communist Party broke with Moscow in 1989 and joined the reformers, Lithuania became the first Soviet Republic to declare independence, on March 11, 1990. This declaration was bitterly contested by Soviet security forces and the Soviet government, but was tenaciously pursued by Lithuania until international recognition was granted in September 1991 during the final collapse of the USSR; the last Russian troops left in 1993.

Ethnic Composition

- Lithuanian 84%
- Polish 6.1%
- Russian 4.9%
- Belarusian 1.1%
- other 3.9%
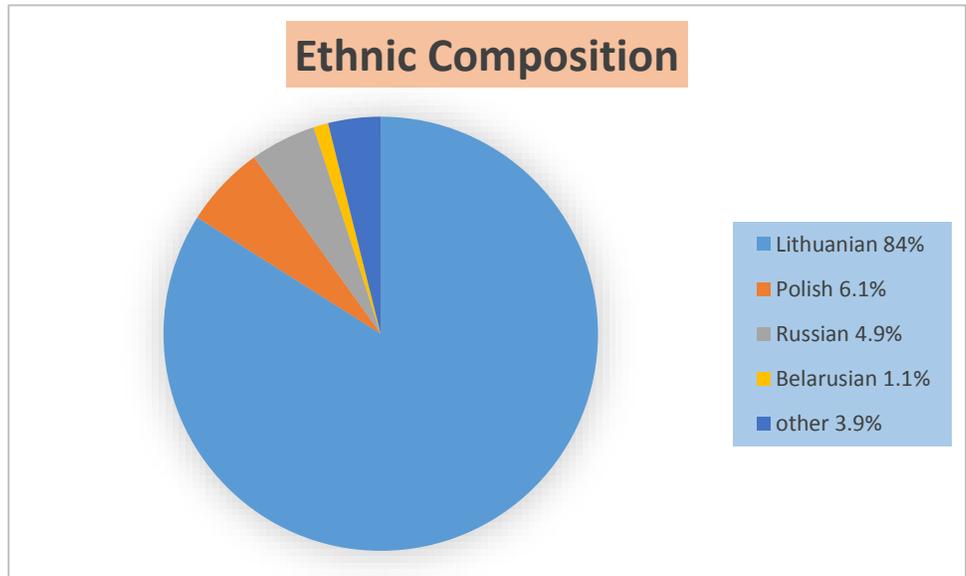
Lithuania's key goal of reintegrating into Western institutions to bolster its independence, security, and European identity, was completed with its accession into NATO and the EU in 2004.

Political Situation:

Lithuania is a multi-party parliamentary democracy, in which its 141-member unicameral Parliament (Seimas) holds the most power. The Seimas, whose deputies are elected to four-year terms, adopts and amends the constitution, passes laws, approves the President's appointment of the Prime Minister, and elects the Supreme Court. The President, popularly elected for a five-year term, nominates the Prime Minister, the Cabinet and all judges, and may request that the Constitutional Court review acts of the Seimas. A party must receive at least 5% of the national vote to win parliamentary representation.

The Lithuanian constitution grants its citizens freedom of speech, press, assembly, and religion. These rights are generally respected in practice. Unlike Estonia or Latvia, which hosted far larger Russian-speaking populations upon independence, Lithuania granted automatic citizenship to its Russian-speaking minority.

The current head of state, Dalia Grybauskaitė, is the first female president of Lithuania. She took office after winning a May 2009 election in a landslide, with 68% of the votes. She was previously the Finance Minister and the European Commissioner for Financial Programming and the Budget.

Religion

- Roman Catholic 79%
- Russian Orthodox 4.1%
- Protestant 1.9%
- other 5.5%
- none 9.5%
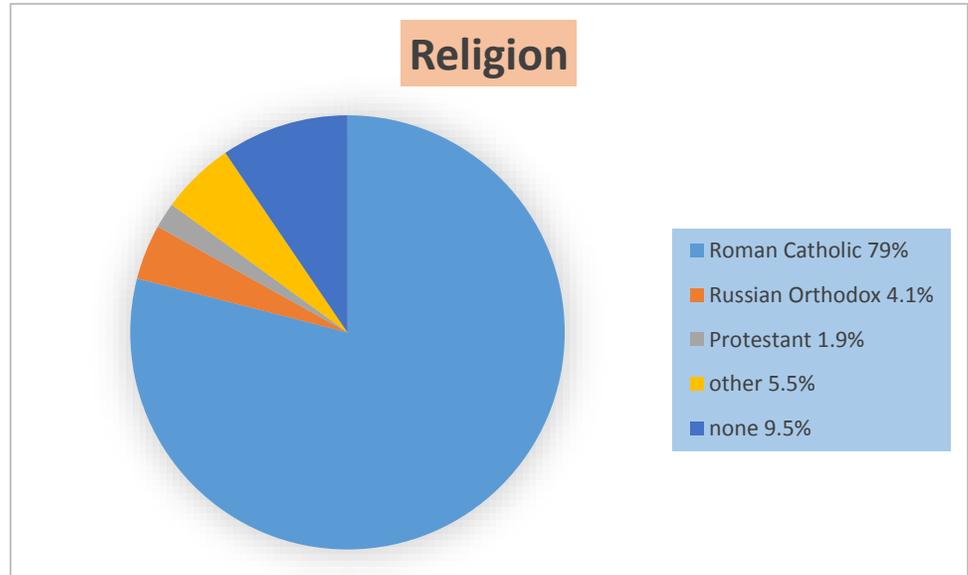
Frequent changes in Lithuania's government between conservative, centrist, and social democratic ruling coalitions have reflected popular dissatisfaction with the economic situation, corruption, and slow progress toward Western integration.

In October 2012, Lithuania held parliamentary elections. Elections were followed by an investigation into 27 cases of possible irregularities, especially cases of vote buying. The Social Democratic Party received 13 seats and became the largest faction in the Lithuanian Parliament.

After the elections, the winning Social Democratic Party, with its designated Prime Minister Algirdas Butkevičius, formed a coalition with the Labor Party and Order and Justice.

In May 2014, presidential elections were held in Lithuania. In the second round of the elections, incumbent President Dalia Grybauskaitė was re-elected with 58% of the vote.

Economic Situation:

The Lithuanian economy endured an initially difficult transition to privatization and the free market, and was seriously affected by Russia's 1998 ruble crisis. However, after shifting export markets from the CIS to the EU, the economy recovered and saw strong growth. Although Lithuania remained relatively poor by EU standards, growing trade with its EU partners, rising domestic consumption and foreign investment, and progress in privatizing state enterprises produced increasing prosperity.

The fallout from the U.S. subprime mortgage crisis greatly affected the Lithuanian economy. The country had 7-8.9% GDP growth in previous years, which dropped to 3.2% in 2008, mainly due to foreign capital, the driving force behind the Lithuanian economy, fleeing the country. The economy shrank 12.6% in the first quarter of 2009, the unemployment rate had risen to 13.4% by 2010, and salaries were drastically cut to reduce spending.

Currency: 0.90 Euro = $1
GDP: $45.93 billion (2013)
GDP per capita: $15,537 (2013)
GDP Growth: 3.3% (2013)

A highly industrialized country with a well-developed agricultural sector, Lithuania has few natural resources but boasts a strategic location astride key trade and transit routes between Western and Eastern Europe. Its Baltic seaport of Klaipeda has an ice-free port.

Additionally, tamed inflation, a demonstrated commitment to democracy and the rule of law, and a highly educated population have brought increased foreign direct investment. Lithuania's main trade partners are Russia, Germany, Sweden, and Latvia. Lithuania has reduced its foreign debt and enacted labor and bankruptcy reforms and banking privatization.

The private sector accounts for over 80% of Lithuanian GDP, with significant foreign investment and ownership. Lithuania joined the World Trade Organization in 2001, and pegged its national currency, the lita, to the euro in 2002. Lithuania adopted the euro in January 2015.

Lithuania recorded government debt of 42.7% ($17.6 billion) of the country's GDP in 2015, reaching an all-time high since 1995.

Foreign Policy:

Independent Lithuania's foreign policy has stressed Western integration and close cooperation with its Baltic neighbors Latvia and Estonia. This includes coordination of education systems, integration of stock markets in the Alliance of Northern Exchanges (NOREX), agreements on security and trade, and the creation of a Baltic energy market. Lithuania is also a member of the Council of Baltic Sea States (CBSS) and of the Baltic Assembly. The Nordic and Baltic states have also cooperated under the NB8 formula since 1992, discussing common economic and foreign policy and regional issues. Lithuania participates in joint Baltic defense cooperation, including the Latvian-based BALTBAT. Concerns over potential Baltic seabed oil exploration rights have delayed the ratification of a maritime boundary treaty with Latvia. Early post-independence tensions with Poland over the rights of the Polish minority in Lithuania have been fully resolved, and the two countries enjoy warm relations.

Lithuania has played an important regional role in promoting democracy. It has joined with the United States and other European nations in urging the government of Belarus to enact political and economic reforms. President Adamkus played a key role in helping Ukraine to resolve peacefully its tumultuous 2004 presidential campaign. Lithuanian troops have participated since the early 1990s in international peacekeeping operations in Croatia, Bosnia, Kosovo, Iraq, and Afghanistan.
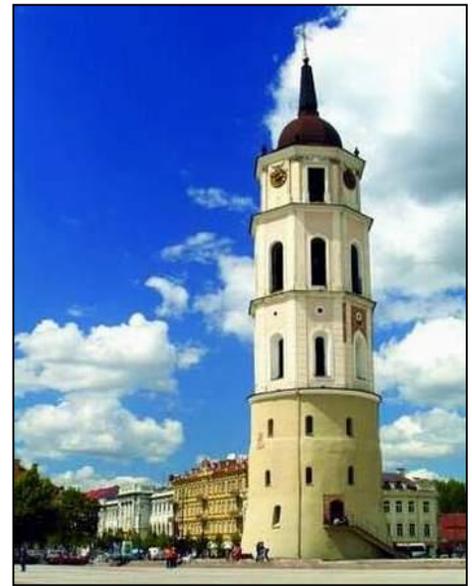
In May 2014, the Lithuanian Parliament adopted a Resolution on Foreign Policy where it reiterated provisions concerning more active Lithuanian participation in European and Euro-Atlantic institutions. It restated Lithuania's commitment to strengthening transatlantic cooperation and ensuring better European security and defense cooperation, increasing defense budget expenditures to 2% of GDP, and actively integrating Lithuania into the EU energy market.

Lithuania's relationship with Russia has been complex and largely dominated by trade and transit issues caused by Lithuania's proximity to the Baltic-Russian exclave of Kaliningrad. Formerly the northern half

of German East Prussia, the USSR annexed the exclave after the war, expelled its native German residents, and renamed the chief city, formerly Koenigsberg.

Although Lithuania adopted a simplified transit regime for Russians going to and from Kaliningrad in the 1990s, its 2003 imposition of a visa requirement for Russians en route to the exclave – required for its EU accession in 2004 – led to frictions with Russia, which complained of being isolated from Europe. Demarcation of the Lithuanian-Russian border has not been completed, although negotiations and demarcation work continue. However, unlike Latvia and Estonia, Lithuania has a relatively small Russian-speaking community and a historically closer relationship with Russia, which has helped to smooth bilateral relations.

In 2006, Moscow temporarily cut off oil flows to Lithuania in a move interpreted as pressuring Vilnius to improve rail ties to Kaliningrad. The Lithuanian government later indicated that it would begin repairs on railroads running through its territory that connect Kaliningrad to Russia. In 2006, senior Lithuanian officials offered strong support to Georgia during its confrontation with

Historic bell tower in Cathedral Square, Vilnius

Russia, and condemned what they described as Russian blackmail against a former Soviet country. In 2008, during the Russia-Georgia Conflict, Lithuania again showed strong support for Georgia. Lithuania has been pivotal in adding precautionary measures into the EU mandate on negotiations with Russia.

In spite of the crisis in Ukraine-Russia relations over Crimea, Minister of Foreign Affairs Linas Linkevičius has stated that Lithuania isn't planning to sanction Russia as part of the broader EU response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine, calling political and diplomatic sanctions more effective.

At the beginning of April 2014, Russia introduced an import ban of Lithuanian meat products that could lead to multi-million losses for Lithuanian businessmen. In May 2014, Russia unilaterally terminated a bilateral national security agreement with Lithuania.

In March 2014, in the aftermath of the Ukraine crisis, Lithuania withdrew its Ambassador to Moscow for consultations, and condemned Russia's actions in Ukraine. In January 2015, a new Ambassador to Moscow was appointed.

Relations with the United States:

The United States and Lithuania maintain close ties, dating back to the American support for Lithuanian sovereignty during the long years of Soviet occupation. America's large Lithuanian émigré community mobilized strong political support for Lithuanian independence from the Soviet Union. The United States granted the Baltics permanent normal trade relations following the Soviet collapse in 1991.

Lithuania cooperates closely with the United States on trade and security issues. The U.S.-brokered Northern European Initiative (NEI) links the Baltic states, Nordic states, the United States, and Russia on a broad range of matters from economics to defense. In 1998, the United States, Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia signed the Charter of Partnership, strengthening multilateral ties and emphasizing ties between the Baltic states and Europe.

Presidents Bush and Adamkus in 2002 (left), and in 2005 (right)

Following the September 11 terrorist attacks, Lithuania opened its airspace and airports to U.S. military flights for operations in Afghanistan, and 40 Lithuanian special forces troops deployed to Afghanistan in November 2002 as part of "Operation Enduring Freedom." By July 2005, Lithuania had 120 troops serving in Iraq as part of the Polish and Danish contingents.

The ambassadors and defense ministers of all three Baltic states met with U.S. Deputy Defense Secretary Paul Wolfowitz in March 2002 to discuss regional military cooperation. In November 2002, following NATO's historic Prague summit, President Bush made the first visit of a U.S. President to Lithuania. He reiterated U.S. support for Baltic membership in NATO, and called for support against Iraq and other dictatorial regimes.

President Adamkus visiting the Pentagon in October 1998

President Bush met with the Presidents of Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia during his May 2005 trip to Europe. During this trip, he called the Soviet domination of postwar Eastern Europe "one of the greatest wrongs of history." Vice President Cheney attended a May 2006 summit of regional leaders in Lithuania, hosted by President Adamkus, and used that opportunity to make what many considered was the administration's toughest speech to date on Russia. President Bush then hosted President Adamkus in the White House in February 2007, thanking him for supporting U.S. policy in Iraq and Afghanistan, and saying he would work with Congress to address the Lithuanian government's strong desire to be included in the Visa Waiver program, which was instituted in late 2008.

Foreign Minister Ušackas and Secretary of State Hillary Clinton met in March 2009.

Lithuania seeks U.S. support in becoming an OECD country, and negotiations for Lithuania to join the OECD began in 2015.

In 2013, trade between Lithuania and the U.S. amounted to approximately $1.4 billion. Lithuanian exports amounted to about $800 million with $300 million in imports. In 2013, direct U.S. investment in the Lithuanian economy amounted to approximately $120 million. The U.S. is the 18th largest supplier of direct investment in Lithuania.

In May 2013, Lithuania's President visited the U.S. and met with Speaker of the House John Boehner, and the chairmen of the committees on foreign affair and defense, and discussed regional and energy security issues with them, including U.S.-Lithuanian military cooperation.

In August 2013, the Lithuanian President, together with the leaders of Estonia and Latvia met with President Obama in Washington to discuss energy security, economic cooperation, and relations with the Eastern Partnership countries and Russia. They also discussed threats to regional security and negotiations on the transatlantic trade agreement.

In March 2014, U.S. Vice President Joe Biden visited Lithuania and met with the Lithuanian President to discuss security of the Baltic States and the situation in Ukraine.

Relations with Israel:

Lithuania has had an ambassador and an embassy in Tel Aviv since 1992. Israel opened its first embassy in Lithuania in March of 2015. Before that the Jewish state was represented in Lithuania by Israel's embassy in the capital of neighboring Latvia. In 1995, then-President Algirdas Brazauskas paid an official visit to Israel, and in September 2005, Israeli President Moshe Katsav visited Lithuania as part of a first-ever state visit by the Israeli President to the Baltics. The two governments have signed bilateral agreements abolishing their visa regime, protecting investments, and promoting cooperation in the fields of communication, health, culture, science, and education. Since 1989, over 6,000 Lithuanian Jews have immigrated to Israel.

In February 2008, during an official visit to Israel, Lithuanian Minister of Foreign Affairs Petras Vaitiekūnas and Israeli Minister of Foreign Affairs Tzipi Livni agreed to seek a more active economic cooperation between the countries. Minister Vaitiekūnas visited Yad Vashem.

In December 2008, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Lithuania Vygaudas Ušackas received Ambassador of the State of Israel to the Republic of Lithuania Chen Ivri. During their conversation the Ambassador raised the issues of restitution of Jewish communal property and the decisions on the former cemetery in Šnipiškės.

In April, 2013, representatives of the Foreign Ministries of Lithuania and Israel discussed ways to deepen bilateral relationships in cultural and economic spheres. In July 2013, Israeli President Peres paid a visit to Lithuania where he discussed cooperation in the sphere of innovation, biotechnology, scientific research with his Lithuanian counterpart.

In September 2015, Lithuanian Prime Minister Algirdas Butkevicius paid a visit to Israel and met with the Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. In October 2015, Lithuanian President Dalia Grybauskaite

opened the first ever Israeli Litvak Forum in Tel Aviv. In her address to Jews with roots in Lithuania and their descendants, the President emphasized their special contribution to establishing Lithuania's ties with the world and invited them to foster connections.

Jewish Communal Life & Anti-Semitism:

Jewish history in Lithuania is rich and vibrant, dating back centuries. The first Jews in the area may have come from the Byzantine Empire and the Empire of the Khazars to the south and east. The bulk of Lithuanian Jewry arrived from Western and Central Europe in the 12th century and the years following, often at the invitation of local rulers and fleeing persecution. Because Lithuania adopted Christianity relatively late (13th and 14th centuries), anti-Semitism was historically weaker there than in Western and Central Europe, which also helped foster Jewish settlement in the country.

The Vilna Gaon

Lithuania's Grand Dukes actively encouraged Jewish immigration, recognizing the utility of Jewish merchants, artisans, and traders to national development. Some Lithuanian Jews were granted the special title of "Servi Camarae Regis" ("Servants of the Royal Chambers"), conferring certain privileges.
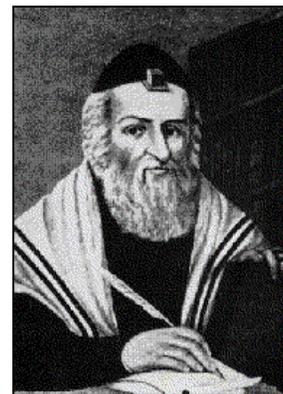
Vilnius, known as "Vilna" in Polish and Yiddish, grew into a legendary hub of yeshivas and Jewish learning, generating a rich body of rabbinic scholarship and an analytical, intellectual method of Torah and Talmud study still known as the Lithuanian approach. The famous rabbi, scholar, and Kabbalist, Elijah Ben Judah Solomon Zalman, better known as the Vilna Gaon, "the Genius of Vilnius," lived his entire life in Vilna in the 1700s; he strongly opposed the emergence of Hassidic Judaism in the region during his lifetime. During the 18th, 19th, and early 20th centuries, Lithuania was a major center of Jewish intellectual activity, thanks to its densely populated urban Jewish communities that supported numerous Jewish synagogues and yeshivas. It is estimated that Vilnius was as much as 20-40% Jewish at points in its history. Before World War II, it was home to 100,000 Jews, who nicknamed it "The Northern Jerusalem" and "The Jerusalem of Lithuania."

By the end of the 19th century, Jews were believed to be 10-15% of Lithuania's total population. Lithuanian Jewry became known for its distinctive "Litvak" culture, centered around a stoic and intellectual approach to Judaism, as opposed to the more emotional and spontaneous Hassidism. Many Lithuanian Jews emigrated in the 1930s to the United States and South Africa, as a result of economic hardships and the growing authoritarianism of Lithuania's pre-war government. On the eve of World War II, Lithuanian Jewry numbered close to 250,000. The vast majority of them were murdered during the German occupation, often with the participation of Lithuanian auxiliary police and military units.

The majority of the current Jewish population in Lithuania still lives in Vilnius, with smaller Jewish communities in Kaunas (Kovno), Klaipeda, and Siauliai, among others. The Jewish community of Lithuania, which now numbers about 4,500, includes resettled Lithuanian Jews, as well as Russian-speaking Jews from elsewhere in the former Soviet Union.

Simon Gurevich, director of the Jewish Community of Lithuania (JCL), and Faina Kukliansky, the chair of the JCL, are headquartered in Vilnius. In 2013, Ms. Kukliansky replaced Simonas Alperavičius, the former longstanding chairman of the JCL. The JCL is an umbrella for Jewish organizations including the Union of Youth and Students, the Children's' Club "ILAN", the Gesher Community Center, the Jewish Cultural Club, the Union of Former Ghetto and Concentration Camp Prisoners, the Union of the Second World War Veterans, the Women's International Zionist Organization (WIZO), the Welfare Center, the Ezra Medical Center, the fraternal lodge of B'nai B'rith, Feierlech Dance and Music Group, and Maccabi Sports Club.

JCL publishes a newspaper online, *Jerusalem of Lithuania*, at the community website www.izb.com, in English and Lithuanian. JCL is supported by the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (JDC/ "Joint"), Claims Conference, Baltic Jewish Forum, B'nai B'rith International, Ronald S. Lauder Foundation, American Fund for Latvian and Lithuanian Jews, and other organizations and individuals.
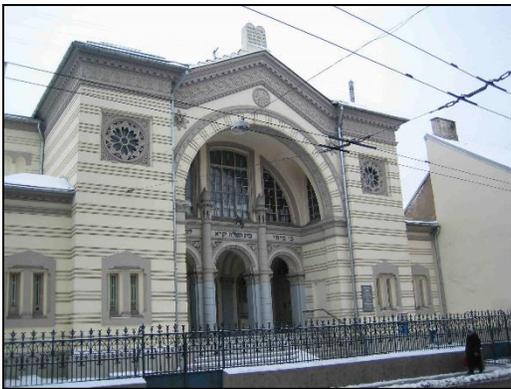
The Choral Synagogue in Vilnius

The Association of Jewish Religious Communities is an umbrella organization for communities in Vilnius, Kaunas, Klaipeda, and Plunge. U.S.-born Rabbi Sholom Krinsky is the chief Chabad Lubavitch representative and has been based in Vilnius since 1994. Chabad Lubavitch runs the Bais Menachem Jewish Day School, and other Jewish education programs in Vilnius, including a nursery and kindergarten, a social center, and a kosher kitchen. These programs are affiliated with the Federation of Jewish Communities of the CIS.

In 2004-2005, the JCL, then led by Alperavicius, and Rabbi Krinsky came into serious conflict over leadership of Lithuania's Jewish community and control of Vilnius' sole synagogue. In May 2004, the Jewish community temporarily closed the Vilnius synagogue following a disorderly dispute in the synagogue between members of the Orthodox and the Chabad Lubavitch Jewish groups. The synagogue reopened in the spring of 2005 and the JCL and Rabbi Krinsky have resumed a working relationship. Most local Jews now recognize Russian-born Israeli Orthodox Rabbi Chaim Burshtein as the chief religious community leader. The dispute appears to have been aggravated by the objection of many Lithuanian Jews to a U.S.-born Hassidic rabbi playing a leadership role in Lithuania, where a long-standing anti-Hassidic tradition dates back more than two centuries among local Jews. The issue of pending Holocaust restitution payments most likely contributed to the conflict, since only the legitimate representative of the community would be able to distribute official compensation from the government.

In 1997, Lithuania hosted an international commemoration of the 200th anniversary of the death of the Vilna Gaon, one of the seminal rabbinic commentators in Jewish history. In 2002, Vilnius hosted the fifth annual intensive program of Yiddish language, literature, and culture, sponsored by the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (JDC/ "Joint") and the Jewish Agency for Israel (JAFI/ "Sochnut").

In 2001, the first World Litvak Congress convened at the Vilnius City Hall with 600 participants from 12 countries. The Congress coincided with the 60th anniversary Holocaust commemorations.

In 2004, the second World Litvak Congress occurred. It lasted for seven days, and thousands of people attended. The activities included 11 concerts, visiting exhibitions of works by artists Rafael Chvoles, Solomon Teitelbaum, Liskula Brenner, an exhibition entitled "Užupis Jewish Cemetery" by photographer Rimantas Dichavičius, and an international academic conference called "Litvak Contributions to World Culture."

Vilna, 1937

In 2009, the third World Litvak Congress convened in Vilnius and gathered delegates from 14 countries. Lithuanian President Dalia Grybauskaite visited the sitting of the Litvaks' congress in the Vilnius City Hall. Among other things, she spoke about compensation to the Lithuanian Jewish Community for the former Jewish religious communities' property, which was confiscated by Soviets and Nazis.

The fourth World Litvak Congress took place in 2013 and commemorated the 70th anniversary of the liquidation of the Vilnius Ghetto in September 1943.

The Limmud-Keshet Seminar of Jewish Communities in the Baltic Countries began in 2004, and has since been held annually. The seminar aims to educate people about Baltic Jewry's past, present, and future. The seminar includes lectures and workshops on Jewish history, religion, traditions, philosophy, psychology, art, humor, and the Yiddish language. Children are highly encouraged to participate, and each age group has a three-day program where they learn about Judaism, play games, dance, and cook Jewish foods.

The Lithuanian Jewish Community has conducted a tolerance campaign called "Bagel Shop" against public expressions of anti-Semitism since 2009. Statistics from 2010 showed that 17% of pre-trial investigations concerning hate crimes were related to anti-Semitism and/or xenophobia. The community has held events to promote democratic values, tolerance towards ethnic minorities, and to raise public awareness of anti-Semitism and xenophobia.

The Jewish community maintains good relations with the Lithuanian government. State-supported Jewish institutions include a kindergarten, a school named after Sholom Aleichem, a library, and the Jewish Gaon State Museum of Lithuania. Permanent exhibitions at the state museum include a collection of Jewish fine art and historical materials, the "Green House" Holocaust exhibit, a memorial dedicated to victims killed at Ponary during the Holocaust, and a history of Jews during the interwar period and the Holocaust at the Tarbut Gymnasium. The Vilnius Yiddish Institute was established in 2001 at the Vilnius State University, and the Martynas Mažvydas National Library includes a significant Judaica section.

Anti-Semitism:

Anti-Semitism has become a growing concern in Lithuania, as incidents have been occurring more regularly, often during Jewish holidays or significant local anniversaries. Additionally, Lithuanian nationalists often identify Jews with Russian and Communist "occupiers." The difficult issue of the complicity of the local population in the Holocaust, which destroyed a higher percentage of the local

Jewish population than almost anywhere else in occupied Europe, complicates Jewish-Lithuanian relations.

Incidents of anti-Semitic rhetoric since 2000 have included derogatory comments by politicians, epithets yelled at Israeli teams during sporting events, burning of Israeli flags, vandalized Jewish buildings, memorials, and cemeteries, displays of Nazi flags, anti-Semitic cartoons and articles in the media, and individuals dressing as Nazis for parades and events.

On March 11, 2008, there was a neo-Nazi parade in Vilnius where the police escorted the participants, who were chanting anti-Semitic phrases. Only after a week, and with many complaints by Jewish organizations, did then President Adamkus criticize the march and the police.

During Mardi Gras and Halloween, it is a custom to dress up in a "Jewish costume" with exaggerated, hateful features like hook noses, horns and tails, and sing about the world economic crisis.

In August 2008, on Tisha B'Av, red swastikas and other anti-Semitic graffiti were found painted on the main doors of the Jewish Community Center in Vilnius. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs issued a statement condemning the acts of vandalism, stating the perpetrators of these acts should be immediately identified and punished, and every effort would be made to investigate this crime.

In May 2008, Lithuanian prosecutors began investigating several Holocaust survivors for their involvement with partisan units during the war. Lithuania has only convicted one person of war crimes in relation to Nazi support, and has yet to punish any Nazi supporters with jail time. Instead, it has investigated Yitzak Arad, chairman of Yad Vashem, Rachel Margolis, a historian, and Fania Brantosovsky, a librarian at the Vilnius Yiddish Institute. Many see this focus on anti-Nazi partisans, as well as the failure to prosecute Nazi supporters, as an attempt to rewrite Holocaust history.

Since the start of 2009, anti-Semitism in Lithuania has noticeably increased in the media. Examples include a cartoon of a hook-nosed Jew and a homosexual holding a globe between them with the caption, "Who controls the World?", and an article titled, "The Rabbis are Wreaking Havoc in Lithuania."

During 2011 a number of anti-Semitic incidents took place, such as desecration of the Ninth Fort in Kaunas; vandalism of the Ponary Memorial and the Plunge memorial wall, and the hanging of a banner with anti-Semitic slogans, including "Hitler was right" near a synagogue in Kaunas.

In September 2012, authorities detained a 14-year who admitted vandalizing a cemetery for Holocaust victims in Vilkaviskis in August. Police had to release boy due to his young age. Another incidents took place in April, when an unknown group of people vandalized a Jewish cemetery in Vilnius.

In October 2012, Julius Panka, a candidate from the small right-wing Nationalist Union party, in his weblog published an anti-Semitic leaflet including a caricature of a Jew and criticism of the government's decision to compensate the Jewish community for confiscated properties. Another candidate from the same party, Marius Galinis, was portrayed in an ad with an almost-shaved head, dressed in a suit with necktie with left-facing swastika.

In April 2013, swastikas and other anti-Semitic slogans were found near the former Jewish ghetto in Vilnius. In May 2013, another incident took place in Panevezys, when an unknown group desecrated an entrance to the Jewish community building. Local authorities investigated both of the incidents, but perpetrators haven't been identified.

In April 2016, the Holocaust Memorial in Vilkaviškis, a city in southwestern Lithuania, was vandalized. An investigation is ongoing.

Holocaust Education and Commemoration:

Beginning in 1994, Holocaust Memorial Day has been observed on September 23, to commemorate the victims of the destruction of the Vilnius ghetto, murdered in Paneriai in 1943.

In 1998, President Adamkus established the International Commission for the Evaluation of the Crimes of the Nazi and Soviet Occupation Regimes in Lithuania. This historical commission has promoted research, education, and commemoration. The American Jewish Committee and B'nai B'rith International, along with other Jewish organizations, are represented on the Commission.

At the National Memorial Day for Holocaust Victims ceremony on September 23, 1999 (the anniversary of the liquidation of the Vilna ghetto), and in an April 2000 speech to the Seimas, President Adamkus reaffirmed Lithuania's commitment to bring war criminals to justice and to combat all anti-Semitism. Prime Minister Brazauskas addressed the 2001 Litvak Congress, emphasizing that the voice of the Jewish community will be heard and addressed. The Seimas dedicated its September 2001 session to commemorating the 60th anniversary of the beginning of the Holocaust in Lithuania.

In September 2002, the Lithuanian historical commission organized and convened the international conference, "The Holocaust in Lithuania: Aspects of Modern History, Education, and Justice." Scholars and historians from Israel, the United States, and Europe presented their research on the destruction of the Lithuanian Jewish community, Lithuanian collaboration and resistance, and Holocaust remembrance and education.

At the 2000 Vilnius Forum on Holocaust-Era Looted Cultural Assets: (l-r) President Adamkus, Rapporteur Emanuel Zingeris, U.S. Special Envoy for Holocaust Issues J.D. Bindenagel, and Rabbi Andrew Baker, International Jewish Affairs Director for the American Jewish Committee

Other events at the 2002 conference included a ceremony at the Paneriai memorial just outside Vilnius, which marks the site where 70,000 Jews were shot and killed in 1943. Lithuanian officials, Jewish leaders and survivors participated in the commemoration, and the state flag of Lithuania was flown with black ribbons at all official buildings. During the conference, the government approved a plan to restore sections of the historic Jewish quarter in Vilnius, and the historical commission signed an agreement with the New Jersey Commission on Holocaust Education to provide Holocaust-related teacher training in Lithuania.

At a 2003 Holocaust Memorial Day commemoration, President Paksas met with Rabbi Krinsky and praised the Jewish revival in Lithuania, just six decades after the Holocaust. He pledged his support for further government assistance to the Jewish community, and awarded the Life Saving Cross to a number of Lithuanians who had saved Jewish lives during the war. Approximately 250 Lithuanians have been recognized with this honor since independence.

Also in 2003, Lithuania commemorated the 60th anniversary of the destruction of the Vilnius ghetto. The ceremony was attended by Lithuanian authorities, a delegation from Israel headed by the Speaker of the Knesset, representatives of international Jewish organizations, and other guests.

In 2004, Prime Minister Algirdas M. Brazauskas and other high officials, representatives of the diplomatic corps and of the Jewish community, participated in the official commemoration event in Vilnius at the Paneriai Memorial. Vilnius Gaon Jewish State Museum organized the official opening of a permanent exposition of art work created by Lithuanian Jews. The special exhibition consists of works of art that were forcefully dispersed or damaged but were miraculously preserved. Additionally, the British Embassy and the UK Holocaust Educational Trust have completed a project entitled *Signposting the Holocaust Sites in Lithuania*.

In January 2005, an official Lithuanian delegation headed by Prime Minister Algirdas Brazauskas participated in the official ceremony of the 60th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz-Birkenau in Poland. In April 2005, the Holocaust Investigation Center at Israel's Yad Vashem Memorial signed a cooperation agreement with the Vilnius International Commission for Investigation of Nazi and Soviet Occupational Crimes, recognizing it as an equal partner.

The Government of Lithuania passed a Resolution declaring 2011 to be the official Year of Remembrance for the Holocaust Victims in Lithuania. The Jewish community and government held several projects that promoted Holocaust education.

The Genocide and Resistance Research Center has developed a list of 1,070 Lithuanians who might have contributed to fighting against the Holocaust in the country between 1941 and 1944. In September 2013, President Grybauskaitė awarded the Life Saving Cross to forty-seven individuals for rescuing Jews from the Holocaust. More than 800 Lithuanians have received awards as "Righteous Among the Nations" from the State of Israel.

In 2013, Lithuania held a ceremony to observe the 70th anniversary of the liquidation of the Vilnius Ghetto. Commemoration events took place at the president's office, the parliament, and at the Paneriai memorial, attended by President Grybauskaitė, Prime Minister Butkevičius, Speaker of Parliament Gedvilas, and Minister of Culture Šarūnas Birutis.

In April 2016, the Vice-Minister of Foreign Affairs of Lithuania Mantvydas Bekešius met with the U.S. Special Envoy for Holocaust Issues Nicholas Dean in Vilnius. Special Envoy Dean commended Lithuania's efforts to safeguard Jewish cultural heritage, and discussed issues related to preservation of Jewish culture in Lithuania and the restitution of Jewish private property.

Restitution:

Lithuania was the first of the newly independent states to enact laws to designate and protect Holocaust-related sites. A 1997 law provided for the restitution of private property to Lithuanian citizens. In October 2000, a state-funded commission helped convene the Vilnius International Forum on Holocaust-Era Looted Cultural Assets, which was attended by 37 national delegations as well as representatives from the Council of Europe. The Vilnius Forum followed up on the 1998 Washington Conference on Holocaust-Era Assets, held in Washington, D.C.

In conjunction with the U.S. Commission for the Preservation of America's Heritage Abroad, the Lithuanian and U.S. governments have signed a Declaration of Cooperation to establish frameworks for the protection and preservation of cultural sites. Following a survey documenting Lithuanian sites significant to the Jewish, Roma, and Old Believer communities, the Commission and the Lithuanian government signed an October 2002 agreement creating a Joint Cultural Heritage Commission to oversee the identification and protection of sites.

The Seimas passed a bill in 2000 providing for the transfer of historic Torah scrolls, housed in the Mažvydas National Library, to local and foreign Jewish communities and organizations. In 2002, at a Vilnius ceremony, the Lithuanian government relinquished more than 300 Torah scrolls and sacred books saved and hidden during the Nazi occupation. The scrolls included texts of the Vilna Gaon from the 18th century. An international delegation, headed by Israel's deputy foreign minister and one of Israel's two chief rabbis, accepted the Torahs.

The centuries-old Snipiskes Cemetery in Vilnius, where about 50,000 Lithuanian Jews are buried, has now become a prime location for commercial and residential development. A Lithuanian construction company had begun building a new complex on the outskirts of the cemetery. The Lithuanian government was slow to react to the situation, which has received international attention. In August 2009, Jewish organizations established the boundaries of the cemetery and the Lithuanian government granted it protection within these boundaries.

In 2011, a $53 million restitution package was announced, to be paid out over 10 years, for communal property seized during the Holocaust. The law also provided 3 million litas ($1.25 million) as one-time payments to individuals.

War Crimes:

The Lithuanian Catholic Church condemned anti-Semitism at a March 2000 bishops' conference. The Church expressed regret that during the German occupation, "a portion of the faithful failed to demonstrate charity to the persecuted Jews, did not grasp any opportunity to defend them, and lacked the determination to influence those who aided the Nazis."

Lithuania has made little progress in the prosecution of suspected Lithuanian collaborators in the Nazi genocide. In February 2001, Kazys Gimzauskas was convicted of war crimes, though the court did not

sentence him, citing his poor health. Gimzauskas is the only war criminal convicted by Lithuania or any Soviet successor state to-date.

Dissatisfied with the Lithuanian government's efforts to address the past, the Simon Wiesenthal Center launched "Operation Last Chance" in July 2002, offering monetary rewards for individuals supplying evidence that leads to the successful prosecution of war criminals. This controversial campaign has encountered much resistance in Lithuania and the other Baltic countries.

In November 2005, the general prosecutor's office announced that 84-year old Algimantas Daiilide would be tried in Vilnius for collaborating with Nazis in the Holocaust during the war. Daiilide was deported from the United States to Germany in 2003 after it was discovered that he had hidden his past. He is accused of being a member of a local wartime police unit that actively participated in the Holocaust.

To date, no Lithuanians have been punished as war criminals with jail time.