



March 11 — the Restoration of Independence Day

THE ACT OF THE RE-ESTABLISHMENT OF THE STATE OF LITHUANIA WAS AN INDEPENDENCE DECLARATION BY LITHUANIA ADOPTED ON MARCH 11, 1990. THE ACT EMPHASIZED RESTORATION AND LEGAL CONTINUITY OF THE INTERWAR-PERIOD LITHUANIA, WHICH WAS OCCUPIED BY THE USSR AND LOST INDEPENDENCE IN JUNE 1940. IT WAS THE FIRST TIME THAT AN OCCUPIED STATE DECLARED INDEPENDENCE FROM THE DISSOLVING SOVIET UNION.

LOSS OF INDEPENDENCE

After the partitions of the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth in the 18th century, Lithuania was part of the Russian Empire. In the aftermath of the Russian Revolution of 1917, the Council of Lithuania, chaired by Jonas Basanavičius, proclaimed the Act of Independence of Lithuania on February 16, 1918. On this date Lithuanians celebrate the Restoration of the State Day.

Unfortunately, Lithuanian people enjoyed independence only for two decades. In August 1939, the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany signed the Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact dividing Eastern Europe into spheres of influence. The Baltic states (Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia) were assigned to the Soviet sphere of influence and subsequently were occupied in June 1940 and converted into soviet socialist republics and were occupied for 50 years.



The start of occupation: the Red Army is crossing Lithuanian border in 1940.



The Sąjūdis Reform Movement was supported by thousands of Lithuanians. Text in a banner "Restructuring — Democracy — Advancement". Photo credits: Romualdas Struoga.

INDEPENDENCE MOVEMENTS AND THE SINGING REVOLUTION

When Mikhail Gorbachev, the leader of the Soviet Union, introduced glasnost (openness) and perestroika (restructuring) policy in 1987 the great and deep changes started to occur. On August 23, 1987 the Lithuanian Liberty League organized the first public protest rally that did not result in arrests. Encouraged by the non arrests, by mid-1988, a group of 35 intellectuals organized the Sąjūdis Reform Movement with the original goal of supporting, discussing, and implementing Gorbachev's reforms.

Thousands of Lithuanians attended the Sąjūdis meetings, as well as the other important public events in period of 1988–1991. People gathered to support the idea of freedom, to listen to the new raising Lithuanian political leaders and to sing old Lithuanian national patriotic songs all together. This period of unarmed resistance also is known as the Lithuanian Singing Revolution.



In 1988–1991 crowds of Lithuanians gathered to support the idea of freedom and new political leaders, singing old Lithuanian national patriotic songs all together.



Text in a banner: "Nobody managed to unroot you, nobody managed to pick you off, because you are the temple, because you are the homeland" (lines from a popular Lithuanian song).

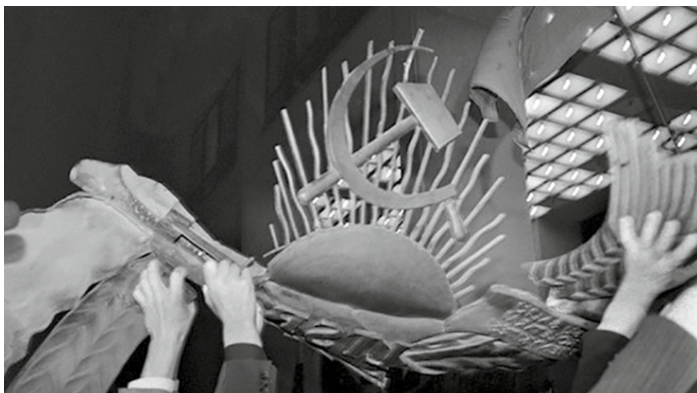
Photo credits: P. Lileikis/Lithuanian National Central Archive.

THE FIRST DEMOCRATIC ELECTION

Parliamentary elections of February 1990 were the first free and democratic elections in Lithuania since World War II. The people overwhelmingly voted for the candidates endorsed by Sąjūdis, even though the movement did not run as a political party. The result was the first post-war non-communist government. During its first assembly on March 11, 1990, the Supreme Soviet of the Lithuanian SSR elected Vytautas Landsbergis as its chairman and restored Lithuania's prewar name of the Republic of Lithuania. It then changed its name to the Supreme Council of the Republic of Lithuania, and formally declared the re-establishment of Lithuanian independence. The act was approved at 10:44 pm by 124 members of the council while six abstained — there were no votes against.



1990 03 11: Members of the Supreme Council of the Republic of Lithuania (in the center — the chairman Vytautas Landsbergis) just after the approval of the declaration of The Act of the Re-Establishment of the State. Nobody voted against.



1990 03 11: The Soviet symbolism (hammer and sickle) were removed from the Supreme Council of the Republic of Lithuania (now — the Parliament) building in the same day. Photo credits: P. Lileikis/Lithuanian National Central Archive.



FREEDOM FIGHTS IN 1990–1991

After the approval of the Act of the Re-Establishment of the State of Lithuania, the issue of independence was not immediately settled and recognition by other countries was not certain. For example, Gorbachev called the Lithuanian Act of Independence illegal, so the USSR demanded revocation of the Act and began applying sanctions against Lithuania including an economic blockade. In addition, on January 13, 1991 Soviet forces stormed the Parliament building in Vilnius along with the Vilnius TV Tower. Unarmed civilian people of Lithuania confronted Soviet soldiers. 14 people were killed and seven hundred injured in what became known as January Events.



Unarmed Lithuanian citizens stood against the Soviet forces in the bloody January of 1991.

ICELAND — THE 1ST COUNTRY, WHICH RECOGNIZED RESTORED LITHUANIA

Iceland was the first country of the free world, which recognized restored Lithuania: On February 11, 1991, the Icelandic parliament voted to confirm that Iceland's 1922 recognition of Lithuanian independence was still in full effect, as it never formally recognized the Soviet Union's control over Lithuania, and that full diplomatic relations should be established as soon as possible. They were followed by Denmark, Slovenia and Croatia (within Yugoslavia) and Latvia. ■

Photo credits: Lithuanian MoD archives, Lithuanian National Central Archive, ELTA



One central street of Vilnius is called "Iceland's street" in honor of this country and its people. Various events are organized here in order to express thankfulness of Lithuanians.