

Assessing the political situation in lithuania politics essay



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This chapter will deal with the political issues that are relevant for doing business with Lithuania. It will include the time from the demise of the Soviet Union up to the status quo. There is not one definite explanation as to why the Soviet Union was ultimately dismantled and liquidated. This is why the mentioned events seem a bit chaotic or random, but all these little pieces are necessary to describe the sentiment that led to the Lithuanian independence. Moreover, politics are not objective, so we try to be as objective as possible by using various sources to give an honest and broad look.

Gorbachev

On March 11 1985 the 51-year Gorbachev became Secretary-General of the Communist Party in the Soviet Union. At the Congress of the Communist Party on February 27 1986 Gorbachev introduced the new policy of perestroika (reform) and Glasnost (openness). Gorbachev was slowly moving towards the western countries and the demand for independence was growing in the Baltic States and in the whole Soviet Union as a whole.

Democratic reform movement Sąsąjūdis

As the call for independence in the Baltic States was growing, a new democratic reform movement was born in Vilnius on the 3rd of June 1988 under the name of Lietuvos persitvarkymo sąsąjūdis (Sąsąjūdis in short). It was established to support the Lithuanian independence wish. The organization quickly gained popularity all over Lithuania. At the constitutional conference held on 22 and 23 October 1988, guidelines were determined that were a basis for independence. Estonia was the first state in the Soviet Union in November 1988 that made a declaration of sovereignty.

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This established a law that made the laws of Estonia rule over the ones of the Soviet Union. This was a milestone in the independence movement in the Baltics as a whole and gave Lithuania more confidence that their independence was more than just a wish.

Algirdas Brazauskas, the Secretary of the Central Committee of the Lithuanian Communist Party (LCP) supported of SÄ...jÅ« dis and this ultimately led to a breach with the Soviet Union. He did not hide his feelings about the Soviet rule over Lithuania, this became even more clear when he reflected in 1990 on the changes within the Soviet Union and Lithuania in particular: We are realists now, and we cannot be propagating any utopian ideas. It's no secret the Communist Party has a dirty history.

Brazauskas separated the LCP from the Communist Party central, then the LCP continued as an independent party. The name was changed to the Lithuanian Democratic Freedom Party.

The Baltic road

On August 23 1989 more than 2 million people from Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania demonstrated against the Soviet Union. Over a length of 600 kilometers were the Balts from all three countries hand in hand between Vilnius and Tallinn. The giant chain of people quickly gained the name "The Baltic way". This demonstration was not just a random date. It was exactly fifty years after the signing of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact by Stalin, a pact that indirectly sealed the future for the Baltic countries to become part of the Soviet Union.

The central government in Moscow continued to criticize the call for independence, but granted in economic and financial autonomy to Lithuania early 1990. This move towards autonomy was shortly after the fall of the Berlin wall that led to the reunion of West Germany with East Germany. It is not unlikely that the Soviet Administration in Moscow felt the heat because after the fall of East Germany, everything was possible. The autonomy meant the administration of it's own industry, agriculture, banking and natural resources other than oil and natural gas.

Restoration of independence declaration and January 1991 events

In February and March 1990 elections were held for the Lithuanian parliament, 91 seats were to be distributed to different political parties through elections. In parliament there were 64 non-party members (including 58 supporters of Sąjūdis). The Lithuanian Communist party received 46 seats. This was a clear win for Sąjūdis.

In the aftermath of the elections in March 11 1990, the law of the restoration of independence was declared. All members of the Supreme Soviet of the Lithuanian SSR signed this law which emphasized the restoration and legal continuity of the inter-war period Lithuania. This was the very first time that a Union Republic declared independence from The Soviet Union that showed serious signs of dissolving now. The elections also led to the election of Vytautas Landsbergis as Chairman of the Supreme Council. Landsbergis was an idealist who was in favour of the newly declared independence.

On January 10, 1991 Albertas Å imÄ-nas was appointed prime minister of Lithuania as a successor of Kazimiera PrunskienÄ-, because she was very pragmatic as a politician. Much to the upset of several Idealists such as Å imÄ-nas who wished the government to take more of a direct and clear stance on the independence wish in the relationship with the Soviet Union. After his appointment as PM Soviet president Gorbachev did issue an ultimatum to the Lithuanian Supreme Council that was led by Landsbergis at the time.

The demand was made for an immediate reinstatement of the validity of the Soviet Constitution, thus forcing the Lithuanian government to take back their independency claim because the Lithuanian government considered themselves independent. Despite giving Lithuania more autonomy and freedom, Gorbachev did not acknowledge this one-sided declaration of independence as stated in the ultimatum: We must look straight into the eye of truth and see the real reasons behind the current situation. They are the result of the severe breach of and derogations from the Soviet Constitution. Furthermore Gorbachev said that intervention with Soviet troops could be possible within days. The truth was that Soviet troops had already been installed in Lithuania when this ultimatum was issued.

When this ultimatum was not met prime minister Å imÄ-nas disappeared on January 11, only to appear a couple of days later, when he was replaced as prime minister. He was only prime minister for 57 hours. Later that day Soviet Army units stormed several government buildings in Vilnius and keeping them occupied forcing a press conference to be held saying that the only legitimate government from that point on was the National Salvation <https://assignbuster.com/assessing-the-political-situation-in-lithuania-politics-essay/>

Committee of Lithuanian SSR. The first acts of Soviet violence were reported and this was an omen for some of the bloodiest days in Lithuanian history to come.

January 12 was a fairly warm Saturday, the Soviet troops continue seizing several types of buildings. As a result people from all over Lithuania got active in the capital to peacefully fight for the freedom of their homeland. They started to encircle strategic buildings such as the Supreme Council, national media institutions and the Vilnius TV Tower to guard them. The Lithuanian Radio and Television tried to maintain contact with citizens many of which had transistor radios with them to keep informed about the latest happenings. The continuing seizing of buildings by the Soviet troops made Landsbergis afraid that Lithuania could be cut off from the rest of the world. This possible situation resulted in people being asked to bring food and tea to all the people that were encircling aforementioned buildings. A clear sign of national unity against the soviet intervention.

The Supreme Council of the Republic of Lithuania classified the actions of the USSR as aggression making them illegitimate.

January 13 1991 was a black day for the Resistance in Lithuania. Soviet tanks and troops started making a move to the TV tower in an attempt to silence the nationalistic media. Upon arrival they started firing live ammunition into the crowds and driving straight through the crowd. 13 people were directly killed by being shot or crushed by the tanks. A fourteenth victim died of his injuries in hospital. More than 600 people were wounded. The troops were able to seize control over the tower and the live television broadcast was

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terminated. The last transmitted pictures were of a Soviet soldier running toward the camera to switch it off.

When a small TV-studio in Kaunas started broadcasting and reporting about the cruelties going on calling for anyone to report about these acts happening in all languages. Shortly after the TV-studio gained support of several university professors that were capable of spreading the message in several languages, making the world aware of what was going on in Vilnius.

These broadcasts caused an uproar that led to the demonstration of more than 50. 000 people in the capital chanting pro-independence songs and making anti-tank barriers.

Acknowledge of independence and integration with the world

The violent acts against innocent Lithuanians in January gave the Lithuanian independence movement even more support than it already had. During a national referendum held on the ninth of February 91% percent voted for an independent republic of Lithuania. Two days later Iceland became the first country recognized the independence of Lithuania.

After a failed coup attempt by conservatives trying to restore the Soviet reign, the Soviet Parliament acknowledged Lithuania's independence on September the 6th, but they still denied any military involvement in the january bloodshed in Vilnius. Lithuania was the first country that had diverged from the Soviet Union in 1940 after it was annexed into the Soviet Union by Stalin. On September 17, 1991 Lithuania became a full member of the United Nations.

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It took until August 31 1992 for the last Russian soldier to leave the Lithuanian territory. Lithuania is a member of NATO since March 29, 2004 and member of the European Union since 1 May 2004 Lithuania is a member of the European Union with the ambition of introducing the euro somewhere after 2013 when they meet all criterias for joining.

New times for Lithuania

After the elections of October 2008 occurred at a center-right government, supported by the Christian Democratic (conservative) Party, a conservative-liberal, a liberal center party and a populist liberal party. The prime minister is the leader of the Christian Democrats Andrius Kubilius. As with most european democracies, Lithuania has a fractured political landscape that makes it always necessary for a coalition government to form.

After Lithuanias independence in March 1991 the conservatives and socialists (former communists) initially dominated Lithuanian politics. Vytautas Landsbergis became the first head of state of Lithuania in 1991. He was succeeded in 1993 by former reformist Communist Algirdas Brazauskas that was also a supporter of SÄ...jÅ« dis.

Between 1996 and 2001 there was political instability in several Cabinet changes. In the years 2001-2008 cabinets of socialists and liberals were led by Brazauskas and from 2006 his successor Mr. Gediminas Kirkilas.

Political Structure

Lithuania is a parliamentary republic with an elected president as head of state. The presidential elections are held every five years. A sitting president

can only be reelected once. Currently, former European Commissioner Dalia Grybauskaitė is president. She is the successor of the independent president Valdas Adamkus, who was president since 1998 but was not allowed to be reelected for a third term.

The actual governing power is vested in the Cabinet headed by the Prime Minister, formally appointed by the president. A government must gain the confidence of parliament to be able to rule. Cabinet and parliament exercise the legislative power.

There is a chamber consisting of a Parliament (Seimas), elected for four years.

Lithuania has a Constitutional Court in which laws can and will be reviewed to see if they are according to the constitution.

The 141 members of the Seimas are elected through a mixed electoral system. Elections are held in 71 separate constituencies. There is an absolute majority required to win the seat. If no candidate gets a majority, a second round between the two candidates with the most votes is called. The remaining 70 members are chosen from a list-system based upon proportional representation. Parties need at least 5% of the votes to be able to get a place in the Seimas.

Political Parties

Lithuania has a multitude of parties, including a small party of the Polish minority. Many parties have been founded because they separated from older existing parties or because two existing parties merged together.

Initially the LDDP (Lietuvos demokratinė darbo partija or Democratic Labour Party of Lithuania) played an important role in Lithuanian politics. The LDDP was the successor of the communist party. In 2001 they merged with the Social Democratic Party to become the Social Democratic Party of Lithuania.

The most important centre-right party is TS-LK (Lithuanian Christian Democrats), they are a patriotic Lithuanian party based upon christian-democratic values. They are the separated right-wing of Sąjūdis led by Landsbergis merged with the christiandemocratic party LKD (Homeland Union).

In 1998 the social-liberal party NS (Naujoji Sąjunga or New Union) was formed. They have reigned with the liberals as well as the social-democrats. The in 2003 formed DP (Darbo Partija, labour party) is also liberal but have more populist ideas.

In 2003 the LiCS was formed when several liberal parties merged. Needless to say this party is also a liberal party. They are centre-right winged.

The in 2008 formed TPP (Tautos Prisikėlimo Partija or National Resurrection Party) also belongs to the centre-right winged bloc. They are known to be against the reigning parties and has ties to Lithuanian showbusiness.

The conservative-liberal LRLS (Lietuvos Respublikos Liberalu Sąjūdis or Liberal movement of the republic of Lithuania) was formed in 2005 as they separated from the LiCS. This party aims at the newly formed younger middle-class in the cities.

Another party that was formed after separation is the in 2002 formed TT (Tvarka ir Teisingumas or Order and Justice). They separated from the liberal party and they are a conservative-liberal and nationalistic party.

In 2005 the issue party LVLS (Lietuvos ValstieÄiu Liaudininku Sajunga or Lithuanian peasantry party) was formed to support the issues of farmers and the middle-class. They have had several diverse political figures such as the first prime minister of Lithuania Kazimiera PrunskienÄ- after the restoration of independence.

Current Cabinet

The (second)-Kubilius cabinet consists of ministers of TS-LK, TPP, and LiCS and LRLS. The current Lithuanian euro commissioner Algirdas Å emeta was the minister of finance. The current Minister of Foreign Affairs is Audronius AÅ¼ubalis (TS-LK).

Because the parties are constantly merging and separating as well as changing names it is hard to give good translations of the political parties and where they come from. However here is the official list of the current distribution of seats in the Seimas to get an impression of how power is distributed in the parliament.

Source: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Seimas>