

The opening of an open-air beach in Lukiskiu square in the heart of Vilnius has triggered a major firestorm, which perhaps can first be chalked off to the nearing parliamentary election in Lithuania in October. The square is sacred to many for its vivid bloody history: tsarist Russia's general and governor of Vilnius, Mikhail Muravyov, nicknamed "hangman" for his cruelty, hung Lithuanian insurgents against the tsarist regime in the square in 1863–1864.

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## Ukraine's Lithuania Ambassador: "We are not only strategic partners – we are strategically like-minded sworn brothers"

Linus JEJELEVICIUS

In the last decade, few countries have become so intricately intertwined with Lithuania as Ukraine, which after the historic Maidan in 2014 chose the European path of development, never looking back. Both countries boast impressive trade volumes and tightly-knit human ties. The Baltic Times sat down to speak about the bilateral relations with Volodymyr Yatsenyuk, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of Ukraine in the Republic of Lithuania.

**How is Ukraine grappling with the COVID-19 pandemic?**

Well, the first case of COVID-19 disease was registered in Ukraine on March 3. As of June 10, 28 381 cases have been confirmed with 833 dead and 12 769 recovered. The total number of performed tests is 445 940.

The Government introduced quarantine in a timely manner, thereby allowing thousands of lives to be saved. It enabled us to prepare the medical system for the challenges we will face in the future. We have managed to fight the coronavirus, we have passed the first three months with the moderate scenario, we have not fallen into the abyss, but today this threat still remains imminent. The Government has also taken quick measures to support a vulnerable population and small and micro-businesses. In particular, a Fund to combat COVID-19 with a



Volodymyr Yatsenyuk is Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary Ambassador of Ukraine in the Republic of Lithuania.

resource of UAH 65 billion was established, and this gives us the opportunity to respond quickly to the challenges that are now associated with the effects of the epidemic.

We understand these consequences, their impact on the economy, and – what is more important – we do understand what we have to do further. The Government has worked out more than 230 concrete measures to overcome the consequences of the crisis inflicted by the coronavirus. The support of

micro, small and medium-sized businesses was identified as one of the key areas of further activities. We are also planning to introduce a zero declaration.

The Government has a clear view on the industrial development, and the main vectors of support in this area should be as follows: domestic procurement, export development programs, resumption of full operation of the Export Credit Agency, changes in certain elements of the Prozorro program on production

localization. At the beginning of the outbreak there was a lot of concern about whether the Ukrainian healthcare system is ready to handle such a challenge. But the timely and well-coordinated efforts by the President and the Government of Ukraine made it possible to avoid the threatening burden of overcrowded hospitals, and to accrue the necessary protective items and medical equipment for the needs of the hospitals all over the country.

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## Political scientist Kestutis Girnius: "President Gitanas Nausėda has more pluses than minuses"

Linus JEJELEVICIUS

While other political scientists are often mindful of "political correctness" when it comes to weighing in on some thorny and/or hot issues or personalities of the political life, Kestutis Girnius, associate professor of political sciences at the Institute of International Relations and Political Science of Vilnius University, is straight as an arrow and never beats around the bush. *The Baltic Times* sat down with him to hear his insights on the developments not only in Lithuania, but in the United States, his second home, too.

How do you see the prospects of Lithuania's major political parties with less than four months till general elections left?



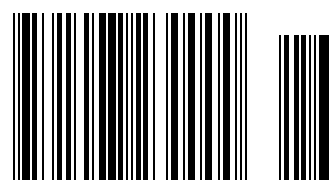
Kestutis Girnius, associate professor of political sciences at the Institute of International Relations and Political Science of Vilnius University

We are speaking on the day when a new opinion survey on the

handling of the COVID-19 virus by the Farmers and Greens (LVZS)

Union-led Government was released. It shows that 58 percent of respondents are pleased with how things are being managed against 26.4 percent who were disappointed. So you have overwhelming support for what the Government did and perhaps what it is doing, thus strengthening its political prospects in October (the election will be held on October 11– L. J.) They can enter the political campaign, saying: "Look, perhaps we have made some mistakes in the past, but we rose to the challenge of dealing with COVID-19... We did well and, therefore, we deserve your support."

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### Living in an age when the memory is stunningly short

Linas JEGELEVICIUS  
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Has there recently been a world pandemic of COVID-19?

When eyeing the Palanga beach, full of people these days – in fact, they lay like herons in a barrel, I cannot resist the feeling that the health crisis occurred centuries ago, certainly not earlier this year.

I remember talking to Jonas, the veteran chief of Palanga beach-guards, in May, when the summer season had just kicked off. He sounded anxious when asked about how he and his lifesavers were going to ensure social distancing on the beach. There were floating various ideas in the regard, even slicing it into 2x2 meters slots, so the beach-goers can enjoy the sun laying safely in their "own" beach "compartments."

But the enviously good epidemic situation that Lithuania has had with COVID-19 throughout and, I'd like to bring it up, the nearing general elections in October, stopped the national health authorities from implementing stringent measures during the summer after the virus tapered off relatively quickly.

Speaking of the elections, it remains to be seen if the public will pay back the ruling bloc, orchestrated by the Farmers and Greens Union, with the generosity that it has seen from it amid the crisis.

As the director of a Palanga-based newspaper (oh, yes, I am a busy bee!), I was cheered up by the government's decision to pay our newspaper a four-digit unreturnable subsidy and a compensation for the distribution of the newspaper to its subscribers. Both measures were meant to alleviate the dire consequences of the pandemic. It is estimated every second Lithuanian received the government's support in one way or another.

Although the opposition Conservatives, TS-LKD, are vociferously clamouring against the Government's decision to allocate subsidies to the COVID-19-affected population or businesses, arguing that the support is political bribery and the splurging will hit everyone hard when the state coffers get empty later, the public appreciates the kindness.

In a new poll, conducted by "Vilmorus", the "farmers" upped their support from 12.4 percent in March to 13.4 percent in June. In a sinister omen for TS-LKD, its approval has shrunk from 17 percent to 14.3 percent.

It remains to be seen where the parties will be after October 11, which is Election Day.

What to make of the poll results and the other political developments domestically and internationally? The Baltic Times asked Kestutis Girnius, a prominent Lithuanian political scientist of American descent.

I myself had the pleasure of reading the interview with the Ukrainian ambassador in Vilnius, in which he honestly addressed many issues. However, the hottest topic in Lithuania perhaps was opening of an Open Beach in Lukiskiu square in Vilnius – with beach loungers, changing booths and even a warning sign: "Beware of sharks!"

Traditionalists argue that it is a split into the face of the 1863-1864 insurgents hung by the tsarist general Muravjov here and the deportees – the Museum of Genocide Victims is a stone's throw from the square. Where do you stand on the issue?

Latvia has led the world against coronavirus pandemic and achieved record low infection rates. Now the people of the Northern European nation want to lead the world again by expressing gratitude to doctors and nurses who were on the front-line of fighting Covid.

The people of Latvia are thankful to the medics in Latvia and all over the world for their selfless service during the COVID-19 pandemic and have put up a monument by a famous Latvian artist to health care personnel, supported by donations of almost 20 local companies.

The six-meter-high sculpture «Medics to the World» shows a female medical staff who has just come out of the treatment room and is getting ready for the next shift. She has closed her eyes and is flexing her back. The figure is put up in a way that allows the visitors can come up to her and try to reach up and touch her hands. In this way the grown-ups can feel like small children for a moment when they're looking up to their parents who are their caretakers and life preservers.

«The three-month long lockdown period and fear for their life made the people change their perspective towards doctors, nurses and other medical staff. Many just now for the first time in their lives realized the vital importance of the medical staff,» says the artist and author of the idea, professor at the Art Academy of Latvia Aigars Bikše. He is one of the most prominent sculptors in Latvia today. His main fields of interest are public spaces and art as a form of communication.

There is a strong opinion in the

## Latvian people first in the world to unveil a statue for doctors fighting Covid



country that the close synergies between health experts and the society in general helped prevent a large outbreak of the coronavirus. With its «Test, Track, Isolate» mantra Latvia is one of the success stories of the world since the nation of two million tested only one thousand positive cases and achieved less than 30 fatalities.

«The main heroes of the pandemic are the medical staff who risked their lives for us in order to preserve the health of the humanity. The wellbeing of the society requires concerted and responsible action. It

means that everyone follows expert advice – maintaining social distance washing hands, and while medical staff take care of the infected. I am pleased that the Latvian people are aware of this responsibility and I am pleased to see that the people have appreciated our work,» says the president of Latvian Nurses Association Dita Raška.

But Latvians monitored the situation elsewhere in the world and therefore are even more thankful to their doctors. That is why so many companies did not hesitate to respond to the artists call to

erect a sculpture for the medical staff «When Aigars told us the idea we didn't think too much. The sculpture is the least we can do to express our gratitude to the doctors and nurses for their work,» says the manager of the creative project factory YesWeCan Jānis Mīkšelsons, who was one of the first supporters of the artists idea. His active involvement made it possible to realize this idea. The sculpture itself was made in the premises of YesWeCan.

#MedikiPasaulei infor

## Baltic and Polish parliamentarians deplore Russian reappraisal of Molotov-Ribbentrop pact

eng.ism.lv, LPB, TBT staff

The chairmen of the Foreign Affairs Committees of the three Baltic parliaments have released a Joint Statement June 25 expressing concern over a bill before the Russian state Duma, which they say dangerously distorts history.

In their Joint Statement, the Chairmen of the Foreign Affairs Committees of the Parliaments of Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland call on the State Duma and the authorities of the Russian Federation to withdraw a proposal that would revoke and invalidate an earlier Duma resolution condemning the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact and its secret protocols.

In 1989, the Congress of People's Deputies of the USSR adopted a resolution that condemned the 1939 Soviet-German Non-Aggression Treaty.

«We call on the State Duma and the authorities of the Russian Federation to make all possible efforts to base the relations with their neighbours on the international law, the respect of their sovereignty and territorial integrity, the restoration of trust in international relations and reestablishment of good neighbourly relations in our part of Europe. In such efforts the first



necessary step will be the withdrawal from proceeding the proposal,» the Joint Statement says.

«World War II caused the death of tens of millions of people, occupation of the Baltic States, and the partition of Poland between two totalitarian powers [which were] the direct results of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact and its secret protocol. The proposed law is an attempt to distort those events and to justify the use of military force against smaller neighbours, and this is done

at the expense of the memory of the victims of the World War,» Chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the Riigikogu (Parliament of Estonia) Enn Eesmaa said.

Rihards Kols, Chairman of the Latvian Saeima's Foreign Affairs Committee said:

«It is an attempt to distort history in order to justify the bloody crimes committed by two 20th century totalitarian regimes - Stalinism and Nazism. Such attempts are especially dangerous, as they seek

not only to justify, but even to support the current policy of the Russian Federation against Ukraine, Georgia and Moldova, in order to pave the way for further violations of international law and threats to the independence and sovereignty of neighboring countries.»

The Joint Statement of the Chairmen of the Foreign Affairs Committees underlines that the proposal on revoking the 1989 resolution will not have any impact on the unequivocal condemnation of the Pact and its secret protocol as an illegal act under international law. Likewise, it will not affect its assessment by historians.

The Joint Statement points out that the rehabilitation of the totalitarian imperialism in the proceeded bill is an attempt to justify the rejection of the equal protection of sovereign states under international law. «It is particularly dangerous since it justifies, in fact affirms the current policy of the Russian Federation towards Ukraine, Georgia and Moldova, and opens the path for further potential violations of the international law at the expense of independence and sovereignty of the neighbouring countries,» the Chairmen of the Foreign Affairs Committees write.

## Ukraine's Lithuania Ambassador: "We are not only strategic partners – we are strategically like-minded sworn brothers"

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In this regard we are also highly grateful to our international partners and particularly the Republic of Lithuania for providing Ukraine with humanitarian aid, namely 15 thousand protective shields. Recently, the government of Ukraine has announced the gradual easing of certain quarantine measures under an adaptive quarantine plan, according to which services and institutions will re-open in stages if certain conditions are fulfilled – basically very similar to the one the Republic of Lithuania has been implementing lately.

**Can you please speak of the trade volumes between the two countries in 2019? In the 5 months of this year? What trends can be discerned?**

Traditionally, Lithuania remains Ukraine's largest trading partner among the countries of the Baltic region. Due to the permanent attention to this issue of the various bilateral cooperation mechanisms during the years 2000-2019, the volume of bilateral trade of goods increased more than six times. Among them should be pointed out the Intergovernmental Ukrainian-Lithuanian Commission on Trade, Economic, Scientific and Technical Cooperation, which is held on an annual basis. The last 14th meeting of the Commission took place in April last year in Vilnius. Another important mechanism is the Bilateral Ukrainian-Lithuanian Economic Forum, the last, fifth meeting of which was held on November 27, 2019 in Vilnius with the participation of the President of Ukraine Volodymyr Zelenskyy and the President of the Republic of Lithuania Gitanas Nausėda.

Lithuania is one of the few EU member states with which bilateral trade has grown significantly since the beginning of Russia's aggression against Ukraine. The total volume of trade of goods and services between Ukraine and the Republic of Lithuania in 2019 reached a record 1 billion 653 million USD. The growth, compared to 2018, is 32.5%. The main export of goods from Ukraine to Lithuania in 2019 were products of the agro-industrial complex and food industry, machine building industry, wood and ferrous metals. The main imports were petroleum products, vehicles and fertilizers. In the structure of both exports and imports of services between Ukraine and the Republic of Lithuania the leading place is occupied by transport services – 63.1% and 60.3% respectively, of the total volume of exports and imports of services.

During the first quarter of 2020, both exports and imports of goods were almost at the level of similar indicators for the same period last year and amounted, accord-



**Ambassador Volodymyr Yatsenkivskyy: "There is much to learn from Lithuania"**

ing to the State Statistics Service of Ukraine, to, respectively, 103 million 662 thousand USD, i.e. 98.8% of the indicator for the same period of last year and 261 million 889 thousand USD – 83% of the indicator for the same period of last year.

I am convinced that these data, as well as the great mutual interest in cooperation between business communities of both countries, give every reason to be optimistic on the perspective of restoring of the high level of such cooperation after the end of the restrictions related to the COVID-19 pandemic.

**Does your Embassy keep a tab on the Ukrainian workforce in Lithuania? How many Ukrainians work here? In what sectors?**

As experts estimate, the total number of the citizens of Ukraine in Lithuania is around 40 thousand. The citizens of Ukraine are mostly employed at Lithuanian transport companies, construction companies, as seafarers, in the hotel business, agriculture, as taxi drivers, etc. I'd like to note, however, that it is unlikely that the citizens of Ukraine can compete with the local specialists, occupying vacant, for this or that reason, workplaces.

**Sadly, some of your fellow countrymen are subjected to exploitation and ill employment practices in Lithuania. I mean that some of them are compelled to live in crummy conditions, are underpaid or not paid at all. How many cases of the kind has your Embassy registered?**

Surely, the issue of possible violation of our citizens' rights is a priority of our Embassy's consular work. At the moment, the cases you've mentioned are not numerous and we promptly react to each of them in order to prevent such cases in future.

**Importantly, what does Ukraine and your Embassy do to prevent such cases?**

One of the main tasks of the Embassy is to ensure effective protection of the rights and legitimate

interests of Ukrainian citizens.

The level of legal awareness of our citizens, which increases the possibility of avoiding problematic situations, is very important in this context. In order to provide appropriate legal assistance to our citizens, the Embassy of Ukraine posted the information on employment procedure established by local legislation on its website, as well as recommendations on actions to be taken during the process of employment. The Honorary Consuls of Ukraine in Kaunas and Klaipėda are doing a great job in this field as well. Taking into consideration the interest of the Lithuanian business community in workers from Ukraine, the issue of cooperation in preventing violations of migrant workers' rights is being discussed with the representatives of Lithuanian business. It is important to underline that the Agreement between the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine and the Government of the Republic of Lithuania on employment and cooperation in the field of labor migration was signed in 2018 and has been recently ratified by the parties.

**Lithuanian farmers were unhappy last year about the significantly lower production taxes that Ukrainian farmers pay. As a result, fair competition is distorted and other European farmers, including Lithuanian farmers, suffer. Does that seem a problem to you?**

Nowadays, taking into consideration the challenges Ukrainian manufacturers have to face, in addition to the significant measures taken in recent years to reform the taxation system in agriculture, there is a number of support measures in our country aimed primarily at supporting various small and medium agricultural companies in Ukraine.

But the state support for Ukrainian agricultural producers is not as effective as promotion of European farmers within the Common Agricultural Policy of the Euro-

pean Union. At the same time, it is an important mechanism for stimulating of small and medium enterprises.

There is a simplified system of taxation of agricultural producers in Ukraine, but it's applicable only to very small farms, whose members can be members of one family only and the amount of land cultivated by such farms cannot exceed 20 hectares. It is obvious that such farms are not competitors for foreign companies on foreign markets, so they sell their products in Ukraine.

At the same time, the products of the Ukrainian agro-industrial complex are usually exported to the EU by large agricultural companies, so-called agro-holdings, which operate under the general taxation system and pay the following taxes: income tax at 18% rate, personal income tax - 18%, VAT - 20%, land tax, set by local governments, as well as excise duty on excisable goods.

It should be noted that the Ukrainian producers have incomparably less support from the state compared to European farmers, who receive significant subsidies for both cultivated land and per unit of produced goods, have access to cheap, often interest-free loans and more.

A relative competitiveness of certain types of Ukrainian goods on European markets is also explained by certain natural advantages, such as fertile lands, favorable climate and relatively low labor costs in agricultural areas.

Can you speak of Ukraine's latest efforts in tackling corruption?

We have set up a system aimed at a systematic fight with this phenomenon. As Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelenskyy stated, Ukraine continues its fight against corruption every day, which is why references to our country as purely corrupt are untrue and groundless. In particular, a unique system of anti-corruption bodies has been formed and is functioning successfully in Ukraine, including such new institutions as the State Bureau of Investigation – has been working since November 27, 2018, the National Anti-Corruption Bureau of Ukraine – since April 16, 2015, the Specialized Anti-Corruption Prosecutor's Office – since November 30, 2015, the National Agency of Ukraine for Finding, Tracing and Management of Assets Derived from Corruption and other Crimes – since February 24, 2016, the National Agency on Corruption Prevention – since March 18, 2015. Special mention should be made of such a unique institution as the High Anti-Corruption Court that started to work last year on September 5. Such an independent and effective anti-corruption court has undoubtedly become a logical outcome of building a complex system of anti-corruption bodies in Ukraine.

**What good governance practice of Lithuania is Ukraine using or considering as applicable?**

Lithuania's success, obvious and indisputable, is also our success. We are not only strategic partners, we are strategic sworn brothers, strategically like-minded. Not only do we carefully study the positive experience of Lithuania; with direct participation, in particular, of a sufficient number of your advisers in Ukraine, we try to implement this experience practically. We are very grateful that our Lithuanian friends advise us not only how to succeed, but also how to avoid mistakes. Areas where the Lithuanian advisers are involved are diverse, from education and science to training personnel for the needs of the Armed Forces of Ukraine. It is most important for us to borrow the successful experience of the Lithuanian side obtained in the context of European and Euro-Atlantic integration.

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The opposition Conservatives (known officially as the Homeland Union-Lithuanian Christian Democrats, TS-LKD) still lead in the polls (a new poll by “Vilmorus”, released on June 18, shows that the “farmers” increased their support among the voters by one percentage point – up from 12.4 percent in March to 13.4 percent now, while TS-LKD saw its approval slip from 17 percent in March to 14.3 percent in June – L.J.) – actually, they have led the polls for more than three years – however the Conservatives do not look very firm to me.

They have a good chance of gaining the most of votes in the first round (on October 11), they might win the first round but are unlikely to do well in the second round of run-offs. They did poorly in 2016 and also in the presidential election (Squared off with Gitanas Nausėda, Ingrida Simonyte, who was supported by TS-LKD, garnered a little over 33 percent of votes, against 66 percent of them by Nausėda – L.J.). So in a nutshell, their chances look bleak, particularly since the Conservatives do not have natural coalition partners, which places them at disadvantage.

Meanwhile, the Social Democrats, who tanked in 2016, seem to be making a comeback. It is likely that they will be splitting their votes with the other center-left parties and, to an extent, taking some votes from the “farmers.” The center-left traditionally has the support of a majority of the electorate better chances in the election (Of 8 post-1990 governments, 6 were formed by center-left parties – L.J.).

**What do you make of Conservatives’ decision to put Ingrida Simonyte on top of the party’s electoral list?**

It makes sense, the party’s leader Gabrielius Landsbergis is relatively unpopular. I’ve always said that you can inherit a house, a plot of land, but not a party, which he did as the grandson of Vytautas Landsbergis, who was the architect of Lithuanian independence.

The junior Landsbergis still has not shown political skills and lacks a strong public presence. I think it would make sense to resign from the party’s chairmanship now, and perhaps come back in 10 or 15 (to lead the party) years when he has matured as a politician.

As for Simonyte, she is not just the lead party candidate – she is also the prime minister-designate, which is sensible because she is a lot more popular and competent than the party chairman. It also

## Political scientist Kestutis Girnius: “President Gitanas Nausėda has more pluses than minuses”



As a political scientist, Kestutis Girnius never beats around the bush

THERE IS THIS CLEAR REALISATION THAT RACISM IS WIDE-SPREAD, THAT THE BLACKS AND SOME OTHERS MINORITIES HAVE BEEN SUBJECT TO DISCRIMINATION AND MISTREATED. CHANGE IS NEEDED, BUT IT IS INAUSPICIOUS TIME FOR MAJOR PROGRAMS – YOU HAVE A MASSIVE BUDGET DEFICIT; YOU HAVE MANY PEOPLE CALLING FOR GREEN DEALS, FREE COLLEGE AND FREE MEDICAL SERVICES AND SO ON.

shows that Landsbergis basically does not have all that much trust in himself and I think that even some members of his own party believe that there are better candidates for leading the party than he is.

**How do you see the first year of Gitanas Nausėda’s presidency? What do you make of his first State of the Nation Address, delivered on June 18?**

I will put it this way: as president, Nausėda has more pluses than minuses on his record, although this is a minority opinion. Many observers think that he is a weak president, with which I disagree. He’s said in the beginning that he wants to influence domestic affairs first. And in order to do that you have to have friendly ties with

the government. He has achieved this, although he has had to make compromises. If you want to affect the domestic policy, you cannot get it done on your own.

The other thing that is very important is that he is trying to change the political culture. When Dalia Grybauskaitė, his predecessor, was president, she castigated every political party and called every government incompetent. Moreover, she openly mocked political leaders and political parties. All of that had a negative political affect – Nausėda is changing that.

What also sets him apart from Grybauskaitė is that he is visiting different Lithuanian regions, seeing with his own eyes how under-developed and neglected some of them are.

IT MAKES SENSE, THE PARTY’S LEADER GABRIELIUS LANDSBERGIS IS RELATIVELY UNPOPULAR. I’VE ALWAYS SAID THAT YOU CAN INHERIT A HOUSE, A PLOT OF LAND, BUT NOT A PARTY, WHICH HE DID AS THE GRANDSON OF VYTAUTAS LANDSBERGIS, WHO WAS THE ARCHITECT OF LITHUANIAN INDEPENDENCE.

ered for that: the US was caught off-guard; the country, at least initially, believed that the coronavirus will negatively impact developing states, but that was not the case; the central government responded to it very slowly, failed to coordinate the response and left things up to governors. Some of them did well, while the others not. And I also think that the president (Donald Trump -L.J.) did not step up to the plate, or more accurately, he stepped up and struck out.

**What do you make of the racism issues-triggered unrests all over America?**

I am somewhat surprised. The scope of the demonstrations is impressive, unfortunately there has also been some looting. Major progress in race relations has been made since 1960s. The kind of protests we had now would perhaps more understandable 50 years ago. Now we see a broad consensus for change. There is this clear realisation that racism is wide-spread, that the blacks and some others minorities have been subject to discrimination and mistreated. Change is needed, but it is inauspicious time for major programs – you have a massive budget deficit; you have many people calling for green deals, free college and free medical services and so on. The bottom line is that all of these things cannot be paid immediately – choices have to be made as to what prioritize and what not. But I am cautious about dismantling of entire police departments – not all whites are racist. If the call for racial justice is exaggerated and denigrates certain kinds of groups, it could lead to a backlash that would limit the positive affect.

**Some say that Donald Trump is doomed in the November election? Do you agree?**

I’ll put it this way: in February, his chances looked pretty good. The economy was doing good and many could say that they live now better than four years ago. Now, faced with the coronavirus crisis and the racial unrests, the presidents’ prospects look pretty bleak, especially that the economy is not doing well anymore. But on the other hand, he does have his supporters, who have seen him through thick and thin. If they will come out and vote in greater proportions while others do not bother to vote, he clearly stands the chance of winning the second term.

## Law-enforcement detains heads of LVK, IBA

BNS/TBT staff

Valdas Sutkus, the president of the Lithuanian Business Confederation (LVK), and Mantas Zalatorius, the president of the Lithuanian Banks’ Association (LBA), were detained by law-enforcement

officials on June 2. Both men were detained as part of an investigation into suspected large-scale bribery, graft, trading in influence, squandering of property, and document forgery, the Prosecutor General’s Office said in a press release.

## Lithuanian subsidiary of Estonian builder Merko to build NATO barracks

BNS/TBT staff

UAB Merko Statyba, part of the listed Estonian construction group Merko Ehitus, and North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) Support and Procurement Agency entered into a contract to perform

reconstruction works of a historical building as barracks in Kaunas in Lithuania.

The contract value is approximately six million euros, without value added tax. The construction works are scheduled to be completed

in August 2021, Merko told the stock exchange.

UAB Merko Statyba is a Lithuanian construction company that offers construction services in the fields of general construction and residential construction.

## Ukraine’s Lithuania Ambassador: “We are not only strategic partners – we are strategically like-minded sworn brothers”

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Our bilateral dialogue is extremely intense and, what’s important, it directly involves both officials from the different branches of power, local governments and civil society representatives.

**Ukraine is Slavic and some in Lithuania fear that, with the influx of Ukrainians, assimilation of Lithuanians through marriages with Ukrainian nationals is inevitable. Some even go further, believing that Lithuania can become more Slavic in the long run. Are the apprehensions substantiated?**

Honestly, I find it a little strange to be talking about any fears in the context of your question. By the way, Lithuania used to be “more Slavic” in the distant historical retrospect. When Grand Duke Vytautas of Lithuania in the 15<sup>th</sup> century sent wheat grain to Constantinople from the port, where today the city of Odesa is located, the Grand Duchy of Lithuania consisted of many lands including Ukrainian ones. Ukrainians have lived in a single Lithuanian state for more than 200 years. Representatives of the Ukrainian nobility or those who had Ukrainian origin held public office, including Lithuanian Grand Hetmans Jan-Karol and Hryhoriy Khodkevych, Konstantyn Ostrozhskiy (Konstantinas Ostrogiškis), Semen Holshanskyi, warlords, magnates, and statesmen. Therefore, historically, this topic is not new for Lithuania and the traditions of interethnic relations are strong enough. A feature of recent years has been the rapid growth of the Ukrainian diaspora in Lithuania. This is facilitated, among other things, by labor migration. These are people who want and know how to work. There is a great interest on behalf of Lithuanian business in their presence. Lithuania has an objective need to involve them, so their problems are clear to the state. The Embassy of Ukraine in the Republic of Lithuania cooperates in this issue in close contact with their Lithuanian colleagues. Lithuania is a strategic partner of Ukraine, and the movement of labor resources is an objective factor in the cooperation of the both states. Economists have found that in developed countries, the contribution of migrant workers to annual GDP growth is 10 to 30 percent. Hardworking people strive to be in the place where the jobs are. At the same time, the task of creating an effective management system of labor migration



Kyiv is a beautiful European-style city

TRADITIONALLY, LITHUANIA REMAINS UKRAINE’S LARGEST TRADING PARTNER AMONG THE COUNTRIES OF THE BALTIC REGION. DUE TO THE PERMANENT ATTENTION TO THIS ISSUE OF THE VARIOUS BILATERAL COOPERATION MECHANISMS DURING THE YEARS 2000-2019, THE VOLUME OF BILATERAL TRADE OF GOODS INCREASED MORE THAN SIX TIMES. AMONG THEM SHOULD BE POINTED OUT THE INTERGOVERNMENTAL UKRAINIAN-LITHUANIAN COMMISSION

has become urgent. Each country has such a system based on the specific conditions and objective needs of its own economy. Such a system should work and develop. If we think that the market will automatically regulate the process of employment of migrants, it can create social tensions and unhealthy competition. Probably, the creation of new mixed families is inevitable, but for Ukrainians and Lithuanians this experience is not exceptional, especially since the mentality, socio-cultural and civilizational foundations of our peoples are very close. And to all those who fall in love, no matter what nations they represent, let us wish happiness, and to their children – good health.

**Do you believe Ukraine’s EU aspirations are real? What milestones has Ukraine passed to become an EU member state?**

Of course, I believe. I’ll tell you more: I do not understand why I shouldn’t I believe it. At the same time, I am convinced that it is appropriate to address your first question where a relevant political decision is being taken. It is particularly a political decision, because, as the experience of European integration shows, significant achievements of potential candidate-coun-

tries are not always enough. Our position is clear – Ukraine’s European and Euro-Atlantic integration is already reflected in the Constitution! Is any other proof of irreversibility of Ukraine’s course towards the membership in the European Union and NATO needed? We should also not forget: Ukrainians have paid and continue to pay too high a price for the right to decide their own future. Ukraine pays for it every day with the lives of its sons and daughters, defending European values and freedoms. Brotherly Lithuania remembers well that six years ago, during Euromaidan, Ukrainians defended the Revolution of Dignity, holding in their hands both the flag of Ukraine and the “European” flag. And no one called on them to do so. It was just because Ukrainians are Europeans. And this is also their flag. As for the milestones, everything is clear as much as possible – in 2014 Ukraine signed and is already implementing the Association Agreement with the EU, which is based on the principles of political association and economic integration. Through the implementation of the provisions of the Agreement we expect to achieve such a level of cooperation with the EU, in which Ukraine enjoys practically all the four freedoms: free movement of

goods, services, capital and labor. I must also mention that the new Government of Ukraine is the first Ukrainian Government to set an ambitious goal – to achieve the Copenhagen economic criteria for EU membership in the next 5 years. Surely, clear and consistent support of Lithuanian partners is important for the success of our European integration course. It was Lithuania that launched a unique initiative known as the European Plan for Ukraine, as well as the Ukraine 2027 and Trio Strategy 2030 initiatives, aimed at providing Ukraine with a clear EU membership perspective. In our turn, we continue to do all the necessary homework so that when it comes to obtaining Ukraine’s membership perspective, no one challenges the justification of this positive decision. It is worth mentioning the words of the prominent American Senator John McCain, whom I had the great honor to know personally while working in Washington: “Ukraine’s destiny lies in Europe. Ukraine will make Europe better, and Europe will make Ukraine better”.

**How do you like Vilnius? Do you find many Ukrainian elements in the Lithuanian capital? What are they?**

For me, the city of Vilnius is one of the most beautiful cities I have seen while traveling the world, and where I have had to live and work for some time. It is unique, really very original and, at the same time, reminds me of other cities with its streets, houses, parks, cafes, quickly making itself your old familiar town and falling in love with it from the first moment of acquaintance. People from Lviv tell me that Vilnius reminds them very much of their beautiful hometown. I am from Kyiv, and I also feel like I am at home: Vilnius reminds me a lot of my own hometown-garden, my native city of churches and cathedrals, the city with its thousand-year history and bright modern face, the city of generous people. I admire the great honor Vilnius residents show toward its history, their sincere wish not only to make the capital more welcoming but also more comfortable to live in. We usually recommend to those who are coming from Ukraine a bus tour around the city of Vilnius to explore the most interesting sites in the historical part of the Lithuanian capital. In addition, this tour is conducted in Ukrainian. By the way, few people know that Vilnius became the first capital in the EU, where the practice of conducting Ukrainian-language city tours was introduced. Undoubtedly, one of the most prominent Ukrainian places in Vilnius is the old Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church of the Holy Trinity on Aušros Vartu Street. Founded back in 1514 by Konstantinas Ostrogiškis, it is one of the most important centers of the Ukrainian community in the Lithuanian capital and throughout Lithuania. An important historical fact is that in Vilnius in 1829-1831 there lived and studied the most prominent Ukrainian poet, writer, artist, outstanding public and political figure Taras Shevchenko – a national hero and symbol of our country. A memorial plaque was installed on the wall of the house where he lived in Piles Street. Another plaque in honour of the “Kobzar of the Ukrainian people”, as Ukrainians traditionally call Taras Shevchenko all over the world, was installed at the entrance to Vilnius University. In addition, a monument by Ukrainian sculptor V. Andrianov, was erected in 2011 in the historic part of Vilnius in honour of Taras Shevchenko. Next to it there is the Ukrainian Square which was solemnly opened on the 8<sup>th</sup> of December 2017 by the President of Ukraine.

cultural industry, will not rush with the return of the purchased ticket.

If, for some reason, it is not possible to visit the next year’s festival, the ticket money can be recovered. Additional information on money recovery is available on the festival’s home page.

## Latvia’s Laba Daba festival postponed until next year

TBT staff

The organizers of Laba Daba music and arts festival have decided that the festival will not take place in August this year, as reported on

the festival’s website on June 25.

The organizers explain: “We spent a long time calculating and thinking about how to turn things around in 2020 to organize a small

and exclusive festival for 1,000 individuals. As a result, we’ve come to the decision that the festival can’t happen this year.”

The festival was due to take

place this year in the Ratnieki of Līgatne parish from August 7 to 9.

The festival is moved to August 6 to 8, 2021. The tickets purchased will also be valid for a visit to the 2021 festival, and no exchange is needed.

Organizers are expressing hope that ticket owners, in support of the

## Linas JEGELEVICIUS

A missionary priest, a Jesuit and pastor, Father Antanas Saulaitis SJ, speaks simply and directly, but his words cut to the essence of the issue at hand. This octogenarian, father of the people, kindly agreed to address a range of topics. The initial question is the effect of the prevailing Covid-19 crisis, which finds the world reeling.

**How has your personal calling to serve people been impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic?**

It is difficult to offer help or extend condolences when someone in the family has died or is seeking an anointing of the sick. First, you cannot visit them due to the quarantine and, secondly, you cannot touch people—have that direct human contact to which we have become accustomed. So, providing the sought-out comfort or support is cut off not only for me but also for everyone else. It is interesting to note how our people have sought solutions to these challenges.

We developed a program in Lithuania for homebound families during Holy Week – from Palm Sunday to Easter and beyond, so they would have some religious activity and prayers tailored to families or singles. It was an interesting and, at the same time, challenging time. We celebrated Holy Mass in St. Johns Church here in Vilnius. But there were no people present. There were just several people filming in the empty church – it was heart-breaking.

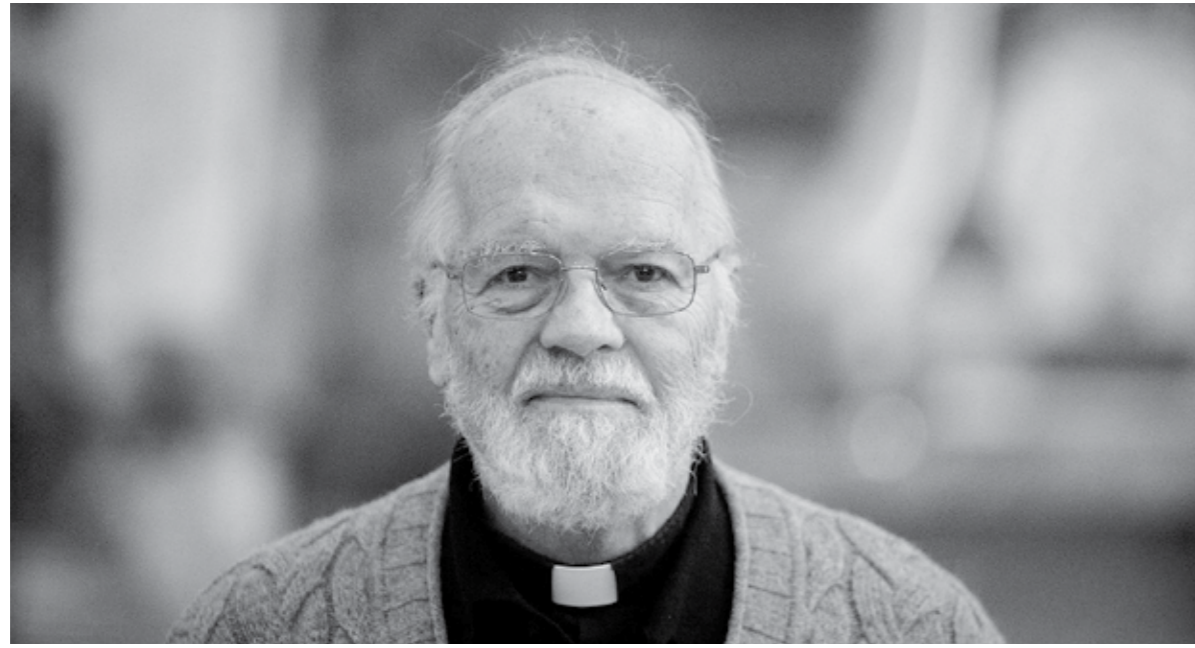
**How do you think that the current confinement and the apprehensions that people have about the future will impact their spiritual lives in the short and long-term?**

It is difficult to say – there obviously is much speculation about it. Many of our people say that they miss church. Not only church activities, but also social events will suffer along the way. Fewer people will be involved in them. In the absence of usual human contacts, some have found or are now seeking other activities, new interests. There is definitely a void in many people's lives now. There certainly will be changes, because people found out they can live without Holy Masses, without time for confession or without time for spiritual conversations. But I think there will be a gradual return, not just in terms of physical health but also in spiritual health.

**Do you remember any event causing the churches and even Saint Peter's Square, the symbol of the Roman Catholic Church, to be closed for such a long period?**

No, at my age of 80, I am not old enough to remember it. It has happened, but only briefly. For example, in Chicago, during enormous snowstorms years ago. Or elsewhere, where, say, power outages – a result of tornadoes or hurricanes – would temporarily disrupt church services and events. In Brazil, where I've worked for years, it wasn't the weather that caused any disruptions, but for a year and a half, we could not distribute Holy Communion because of a menin-

## How to apply God's graces in this difficult time



Father Antanas Saulaitis speaks simply and directly, but his words cut to the essence of the issue at hand

FATHER ANTANAS SAULAITIS SJ, IS WELL KNOWN TO LITHUANIANS AROUND THE WORLD AS A PASTOR, COMMUNITY LEADER, PEDAGOGUE, AND AUTHOR. BORN IN LITHUANIA, HE FLED THE COUNTRY WITH HIS PARENTS TO ESCAPE THE ADVANCING RED ARMY AT THE END OF WORLD WAR II. IN 1949, HIS FAMILY CAME TO THE UNITED STATES. HE JOINED THE SOCIETY OF JESUS IN 1961 AND WAS ORDAINED A PRIEST IN 1969. HIS FIRST ASSIGNMENT WAS IN BRAZIL, WHERE HE SERVED AS PASTOR OF THE LITHUANIAN PARISH OF SÃO PAULO. HE LATER RETURNED TO THE US AND WAS APPOINTED DIRECTOR OF THE LITHUANIAN JESUIT YOUTH CENTER IN CHICAGO. IN 1997 FATHER SAULAITIS RELOCATED TO LITHUANIA, WHERE HE SERVED AS THE JESUIT PROVINCIAL FOR LITHUANIA AND LATVIA. HE HAS TAUGHT AT VILNIUS AND MYKOLAS ROMERIS UNIVERSITIES. IN 2006, HE RETURNED TO THE US TO WORK AS DIRECTOR OF THE BLESSED JURGIS MATULAITIS LITHUANIAN MISSION IN LEMONT, ILLINOIS. PRESENTLY, HE RESIDES IN VILNIUS AND IS THE VICE-RECTOR OF STS. JOHNS CHURCH IN VILNIUS. FATHER SAULAITIS HAS BEEN A REGULAR CONTRIBUTOR TO THE LITHUANIAN PRESS, AN ACTIVE MEMBER OF LITHUANIAN SCOUTING, AND A MUCH-LOVED YOUTH COUNSELOR THROUGHOUT HIS LIFE. HE IS THE AUTHOR OF NUMEROUS BOOKS, INCLUDING LITHUANIAN MISSIONS IN THE AMAZON (IN LITHUANIAN) AND SEVERAL QUESTION/ANSWER BOOKS FOR CHILDREN.

gits epidemic. It impacted the entire community there in the 1970s.

You have spent many summers camping with Lithuanian American youth – scouts, the Ateitis Catholic Youth group, and English-speaking Lithuanians. All of the Lithuanian camps in the US have been called off this summer. Is there an alternative program for our young people?

From what I see regarding Camp Neringa (in Brattleboro, Vermont) and Camp Dainava (in Manchester, Michigan) and the scouts as well, would-be campers are trying to maintain contact during this pandemic crisis. They stay in touch with each other; they converse through social media. The internet has clearly substituted their other usual activities. I understand that the scouts will shortly renew some of their activities, such as bike rallies. They have already started meeting locally in the towns where they live, a sign of returning to normalcy.

**Speaking of a broader picture, what do you believe are the greatest challenges the Church faces in dealing with the epidemic?**

One of the overriding challenges is finances. Church collections here in Lithuania are mostly "cash only" during church services. Thus, when there are disruptions, especially for extended periods, churches are left without needed financial support. The only way to help out the local church is by donating through a bank—something not everyone can or is accustomed to doing. The same holds for the Church's educational and charitable programs and institutions. I'd encourage people to visit a local church's homepage and attempt to donate to the church directly to its bank account. Facebook pages of many churches also provide for such service. In the United States, it is usual to mail a check to the local church; however, in Lithuania, the traditional cash donations prevail. Then there is the matter of confession – the ability to get together with a priest and talk

mental elections is decreasing since people do not trust institutions.

**Is the Church outweighing the secular trends?**

Well, it is hard to say. I think that all the churches in the West are grappling with the issue of people becoming less religious – be it the Roman Catholic Church, the Protestant Church, the Jewish faith, and others. But in some regions of the world – South America, parts of Africa, and Southeast Asia – people are embracing religion, as the traditional faiths are becoming more enculturated in the local way of life.

**Do you feel okay with the Church accepting new social norms?**

The Gospel is for all kinds and for all people, but it has to be adjusted as the world changes. For example, I recall a friend who was a pastor of a fishermen's parish in Brazil. When he arrived at the deteriorating parish, he asked himself, what do the people need the most. It was drinking water. There was an acute shortage of fresh water. Many children would die before reaching five years of age. Instead of spending his time giving sermons, he organized a program to obtain filters for the water so that the children wouldn't die. The Church is not just the pews and the sermons – it is about service of all kinds. Building communities and supporting families remain one of the main tasks of the Church.

**You've spent quite some time shepherding people of faith in Brazil. What are your most vivid memories? What do you miss?**

Well, I lived in Brazil for more than 40 years ago. I remember best the closeness of the local inhabitants, including a small Lithuanian community. All of them came together in building the community, the parish, and the Church. There I became convinced that every person is important. We would drive hundreds of kilometers to visit a single Lithuanian at a remote place or in another town. These Lithuanians in Brazil valued their heritage – even to the fifth generation. They passed it on to their children and grandchildren.

**If you meet someone in low spirits, despondent or miserable, how would you counsel such a person?**

I would advise that you find someone to talk to, for instance, call a long-distance cousin, or anyone for that matter with whom you can share your feelings, your distress or fear. Find a group of people who share your interests and join them in the good that they do. Do not be afraid to seek support and, most importantly, remember that someone close to you may be worse off than you are. Finally, ask yourself: how can you yourself help others during the difficult times? And, yes, don't be afraid to pick up the Bible – there is always a passage there that can address your concern.

**Are you worried about the secular trends in the Church?**

I cannot be worried about something that is real. The Church and the clergy have to make an effort to get others to help out and participate. As a matter of fact, I believe that the secular movement is not bad at all, as it makes the Church and religious matters more honest and more open towards everyone. Most predicted Church's participation would grow less and less – people nowadays do not approve of institutional order, including governments. Participation in govern-

*The interview is republished from Draugas, the newspaper of the Lithuanian émigré community in the United States.*

## European Commission launches Just Transition Platform

**LETA/BNS/TBT staff**

The European Commission on June 29 launched the Just Transition Platform (JTP) to help member states draw up their territorial just transition plans and access funding from the over 150 billion euro Just Transition Mechanism (JTM).

The online platform will provide technical and advisory support for public and private stakeholders in coal and other carbon-intensive regions with easy access to information on funding opportunities and sources of technical assistance, the European Commission said.

The platform will ensure that the 40 billion euros -- in 2018 constant prices -- proposed under the Just Transition Fund is channeled to the right projects and that no region is left behind. It will also support access to the dedicated scheme under InvestEU and the public sector loan facility, which together with the Just Transition Fund form the three pillars of the Just Transition Mechanism.

The platform will provide technical and advisory support to member states and regions, including on the operationalization of the territorial Just Transition Plans and the building of pipelines of projects for the Just Transition Mechanism; a web-based single access point, including the possibility to contact the Commission with technical and administrative questions related to just transition; sharing of information, experience and knowledge for fossil fuel and carbon-intensive regions, with dedicated project and expert databases; a forum for dialogue on just transition involving local and national stakeholders, social partners, public authorities and EU institutions.

Executive Vice-President for the European Green Deal Frans Timmermans, Commissioner for Cohesion and Reforms Elisa Ferreira and Commissioner for En-



ergy Kadri Simson launched the Just Transition Platform during an online event on Monday morning.

"Our Green Deal ambition is to demonstrate a new model for inclusive transformation based on a just transition. As we rebuild our economies and societies, we owe it to our children and grandchildren to grasp the opportunity to build a more sustainable future. With the Just Transition Platform, we can start making this a reality," Timmermans said.

"The Just Transition Platform is a firm step towards a climate-neutral Europe. I encourage authorities from all member states to make full use of it when developing and implementing territorial just transition plans that promote economic renewal, new skills and new job opportunities. I am determined that no one is left behind and that all regions and all Europeans are able to tap the benefits of a greener, fairer more digital future," Ferreira said.

"The Just Transition Platform will provide tailor-made support to regions that will be most affected by the green transition. It will bring together expertise from all relevant Commission services to make sure that fossil fuel and carbon intensive regions have all the information, tools and assistance they need to transform their economies in a fair way," Simson said.

The platform will host projects

and experts database towards the end of 2020.

The Just Transition Mechanism (JTM) is part of the European Green Deal effort to create a climate-neutral economy in Europe by 2050. The mechanism will seek to overcome the economic and social costs of the climate transition in the most vulnerable coal and carbon-intensive regions.

The mechanism consists of three pillars of financing: the Just Transition Fund, proposed on January 14 and strengthened by the May 27 recovery package; a dedicated just transition scheme under InvestEU; and a public sector loan facility.

The three pillars are expected to mobilize more than 150 billion euros of investments in the EU regions most vulnerable to the climate transition over the period 2021-2027.

Announced with the European Green Deal Investment Plan, the Just Transition Platform builds on and expands the work of the Initiative for Coal Regions in Transition, and is part of the Just Transition Mechanism.

It will have three work streams: coordinated technical assistance from the European Commission and the European Investment Bank (EIB) group, a web-based single access point and help desk, and events promoting stakeholder involvement and the exchange of best practices.

## Lithuania's Seimas accords memorial status to Vilnius Lukiskes Square



**BNS/TBT staff**

Lithuania's Seimas on June 29 adopted a law establishing the central Lukiskes Square in Vilnius as the main representative square of the Lithuanian State with a monument to Vytytis, Lithuania's national emblem. The bill, which was put forward in response to an initiative of the local authority of Vilnius to create a temporary beach at the square, was passed in a vote of 78 to 11 with four abstentions.

Pursuant to the law, the memorial accents of the square shall include and reflect fights for Lithuania's independence and the memory of freedom fighters who lost their lives for the country's independence, as well as the commanders of the 1863-1864 uprising against Tsarist rule in the former Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth who were executed in the square in 1864.

The law provides that the management of the square shall ensure public peace and adequate respect for the memory of freedom fighters and uprising participants and

its use cannot run against public order or morality.

The Seimas also approved a last-minute amendment establishing Vytytis monument embodying the symbol of Lithuania's State and a memorial to the fallen for Lithuania's freedom as the main accent of Lithuania's representative square.

The ruling bloc rushed through a bill according a special status to the central Vilnius square in response to the initiative of the local authority of Vilnius to install a temporary beach at the square.

Some policymakers slammed the initiative as disrespect for the memory of freedom fighters. President Gitanas Nausėda also criticized the choice of this square for the beach.

The beach covering an area of 1,660 square meters was installed in Lukiskes Square and part of Gediminas Avenue last week, using around 300 cubic meters of sand.

Pursuant to the initiative, the beach will stay the whole summer. It also features a huge TV screen showing Telia TV films, shows, concerts and the views of the Baltic Sea until the end of July.

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## Latvia becomes member of European Space Agency



market. Part of the Member States' contributions is the ESA budget, which is used for the maintenance of ESA infrastructure, the development and administration of new programs for the further development of the space sector.

IZM explained that Latvia's becoming an associated Member State of ESA is an investment in:

1-People of Latvia, as participation in European space missions and consortia will allow employees to develop high-tech skills and

competences in the space sector, students and teachers to participate in activities under the supervision of ESA experts.

2-economic growth, as it will allow Latvia the access to technology for missions organised by ESA involving 22 European countries and international partners from the US, Japan, Canada and other technologically advanced countries.

3-research and development, as it will offer scientific institutions to carry out excellent research projects under the supervision of ESA experts, using ESA's research infrastructure.

The space sector in Latvia and Europe is an interdisciplinary sector involving the development of space-related sciences and cross-sectoral industries, environmental protection, climate change, energy,

telecommunications, traffic, civil security and other issues. Until now, fifteen different Latvian organisations have implemented 51 space technology development projects of 6.63 million, according to IZM.

ESA is an international organisation composed of 22 Member States. Its mission is to build and develop Europe's space capabilities and to ensure that investment in the space sector brings benefits to Europe's citizens and industry. ESA has set up seven technology centers in various ESA Member States with its headquarters in France, Paris. ESA employs around 2200 scientists, engineers, information technology specialists and administrative personnel from all ESA Member States. ESA's budget for 2020 is EUR 6.68 billion. Latvia's cooperation with ESA started in 2009.

# Kremlin reopens chapter on Baltic occupation. Why?

## EUvsDisinfo

An article attributed to Russian President Vladimir Putin claimed the Baltic states were occupied with "consent". Two days prior on June 16, a story on Russia Beyond – an outlet under the same state ownership as RT – claimed it was a "privilege" to live in the Baltics during the Soviet occupation.

The Kremlin's disinformation campaign has once again been dialled to history, due to the postponed Victory day parade celebrating the 75th anniversary of WW2.

This time, the kick-off came from the Twitter account of the Russian embassy in Estonia, sharing an article from Russia Beyond titled, "Why the Baltics was a great place to live under the Soviets"

The article itself, based constructed around a series of glossy photographs of Soviet-occupied Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania in the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s, was meant to showcase the Baltic states as the most privileged republics in the USSR and display "the best of what this gigantic country (ie the USSR) had to offer".

What the article fails to mention is that the Baltic states were illegally annexed by the Soviet regime and continued their resistance – first armed, later peaceful – throughout the decades of occupation.

The article makes a number of claims, rooted in the narratives of pro-Kremlin disinformation, and skips over the not-so-glossy aspects of what can only be understood as a deliberate editorial choice to white-wash Soviet occupation.

It claims, for example, that "the radical Soviet-style reforms of the day were applied with much more caution" in the Baltic states, without even referring to the Soviet repressions. Notably, the article itself was published in mid-June, when the Baltic states commemorate mass deportations of their population to Siberia.



The article also includes many classical disinformation narratives such as: "Latvia, Estonia and Lithuania were considered among the most privileged of the 16 USSR republics."

And when you are occupied, it's always nice to know that at least it is a privilege. In the mind of the occupying force, that is.

And there were 16 republics only until 1956, after that there were 15.

"Baltic 'territories', with their Latvian, Lithuanian and Estonian populations, always enjoyed a special status, both as part of the Russian Empire and the USSR. Soviet authorities always tried to take into account the special historical and economic circumstances of this 'European' region that was so different from the rest of the country."

Baltics states were and remain a part of Europe. The dominating language in the USSR was Russian, and it was heavily promoted in schools and public life at the expense of local languages.

The article also alleges that the Soviet Union supported national cultures, while in reality culture was a servant of regime.

After WW2, the strict canon of Stalinist socialist realism prevailed in the Soviet Union, according to which artists had to mediate ideological messages from the Communist Party in a realist manner. After Stalin's death, the Soviet society became more liberal and the Communist Party's demands on art became less stringent, however the official prescriptions to Soviet culture endured until the 1980s.

"A larger portion of the country's money was injected into developing their potential."

The Moscow-controlled development of a highly centralised and planned economy resulted in constant shortages of common goods, forced industrialisation without consideration of the interests of local communities and the arrival of migrant workers from all over the

tually ten times higher at that time.

A good overview of life under the soviet rule is also offered by Russia Beyond's own YouTube channel. In a video from 2018, the host states that "there are people who lived most of their lives during Soviet rule and they have no desire whatsoever to go back. To them, memories of endless lines in shops and medical facilities, party assemblies, censorship and eavesdropping, the helplessness of an individual facing society and government oppression and poverty all outweigh any benefits socialism provided. The country was isolated, closed to the outside world. Bands like The Beatles and Rolling Stones were banned, books were banned [the state banned all books that were deemed a threat to the party – EUvsDisinfo], jeans were impossible to get. So this pretty picture nostalgia paints about the USSR is largely a distorted view of one's youth. Or a result of poor knowledge of history, where the positive is exaggerated while the negative is either forgotten or significantly played down."

Dmitri Teperik, Chief Executive of the International Centre for Defence and Security think tank, points out that the Kremlin is able to inspire its followers to try to weaken or undermine the achievements of the West and open society.

However, "it is surprisingly powerless in its mediocre attempts to create new positive meanings, encouragingly appealing narratives and optimistic prospects."

In a situation where only the past seems to have a bright future, twisting the facts and carefully selecting images to support the Kremlin's narrative has been a time-honoured tactic to gloss over the unpleasant pages of Soviet history.

EUvsDisinfo, the disinformation fighting agency of the European Union, looks at the facts behind what Lithuanian officials say is Russia's historical revisionism.

Lithuania's parliament, Seimas, on June 26 adopted a new law on lobbying after a scandal involving the country's banking association and business confederation.

The adopted law established the so-called cross-declaration that requires lobbyists, as well as politicians and public servants who have contact with lobbyists, to report their activities.

The bill put forward by the ruling bloc was adopted in a vote of 61 to 8 with 26 abstentions.

Once signed into law by the president, the bill should come into force on January 1, 2021.

The ruling Farmers and Greens Union (LVŽS) tabled the bill last week following suspicions of large-scale bribery and influence peddling against two major business organisations.



## Lithuanian PM plays down increase in Rail Baltica costs

### LETA/BNS/TBT staff

Despite cost increase, implementation delay and economic sustainability risks identified by the European Court of Auditors (ECA), Rail Baltica was rated as one of the best performing among the major EU infrastructure projects audited by the watchdog, Lithuanian Prime Minister Saulius Skvernelis said on June 17.

Skvernelis played down the ECA's warning that Rail Baltica may run well over budget, noting that all eight transport "megaprojects" audited have increased in cost.

"The costs of all eight projects have increased. Additional links have emerged (in Rail Baltica), including Vilnius-Kaunas, a link to Riga's railway station, and a tram link in Tallinn," the prime minister told a news conference.

"This project (Rail Baltica) is rated by the European Commission and the Court of Auditors as the most advanced and the least risky," he added. The ECA's overall conclusions show that Lithuania is

a role model when it comes to the implementation of Rail Baltica, according to Skvernelis.

The ECA published on June 16 a report on its audit of eight major EU infrastructure projects. The watchdog concluded that the implementation of these projects should be accelerated "to deliver network effects on time".

Rimantas Sadzius, the Lithuanian ECA member, also told BNS on Wednesday that Rail Baltica was one of the best performing among the audited projects.

Rail Baltica will integrate the Baltic countries into the European railway network. The project provides for building a European standard 1,435 mm gauge electrified railway from Tallinn to the Lithuanian-Polish border for passenger and freight transport.

Rail Baltica is largely funded from EU funds and its implementation is closely monitored by the European Commission and the Lithuanian, Latvian and Estonian national authorities.

## Lithuania adopts new lobbying law



### BNS/TBT staff

Valdas Sutkus, president of the Lithuanian Business Confederation, and Mantas Zalatorius, the president of the Association of Lithuanian Banks (LBA), are accused by law enforcement of corruption.

Zydrunas Bartkus, head of Lithuania's anti-corruption watchdog, the STT, previously told reporters that the case involving Sutkus and Zalatorius is related to lobbying activities.

LVŽS MP Agnė Širinskienė, chair of the parliamentary Committee on Legal Affairs, said the new law would require business associations to register as lobbyists.

An earlier attempt to adopt new regulations on lobbying practices ended in failure as the new version of the law drafted by the Justice Ministry got stuck in discussions at the Seimas at the end of last year.

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## SEB bank hit with huge fine in Sweden over Baltic banking mistakes

### eng.ism.lv, TBT staff Latvian Public Broadcasting

Sweden's financial supervisory authority, Finansinspektionen (FI), said June 25 it was fining SEB bank 1 billion krona (960 million euros) for "deficiencies in its work to combat anti-money laundering in the Baltics".

"SEB has not sufficiently identified the risk of money laundering in its Baltic operations and has had deficiencies in its governance and control of the Baltic subsidiary banks' anti-money laundering measures. SEB is therefore being issued a remark and an administrative fine of SEK 1 billion," an announcement from FI said.

An investigation covering the period 2015-Q1 2019, shows that SEB's subsidiary banks in the Baltics were exposed to an elevated risk of money laundering.

"This is due in part to their geographic location but also because customers with a higher risk of money laundering have been responsible for a substantial portion of the subsidiary banks' business volumes and transactions," FI said.

FI's investigation also showed that the bank has had deficiencies in identifying and managing the risk of money laundering associated with some of their non-resident customers and resident customers with non-resident owners. The bank has also not been able to sufficiently rectify deficiencies identified by the bank's control bodies during the period. In addition,

which is a lower degree of an administrative sanction that is issued when a breach has not been deemed to be serious. The FSA has also decided to issue SEB an administrative fine of SEK 1bn, which corresponds to about 14 percent of the maximum amount the FSA can impose in this case, as well as a precept to take certain measures to improve its transaction monitoring."

"SEB will now analyse the decision and revert with the bank's view. We always strive to adhere to current regulations and our high internal standards, and we continuously develop the bank's abilities to prevent, detect and report suspected money laundering and other types of financial crime. That work is of highest priority and will never end, not least since crime constantly finds new ways," said President and CEO Johan Torgeby.

As previously reported, SEB was fined nearly 1.8 million euros by the Latvian financial regulator in December 2019.

SEB's internal control functions and transaction monitoring have not had sufficient resources.

FI made the assessment that, despite the bank's actions, the bank's deficiencies during the period under investigation have meant that the bank did not comply with the requirements laid down by law.

"Despite the elevated risk of money laundering in the Baltics, the bank has done too little, too late," said FI Director General Erik Thedéen.

FI's investigation of SEB was coordinated with the supervisory authorities in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. SEB's Estonian subsidiary is also receiving a precept and a fine from the Estonian financial supervisory authority for breaches of local anti-money laundering requirements. The bank's Baltic subsidiaries have also previously received a sanction in Latvia and an order to correct deficiencies in Lithuania.

In response, SEB made some effort to downplay the seriousness of the sanction, saying: "The [FI] has decided to issue SEB a remark,

the current guaranteed minimum income (GMI) level does not comply with the Constitution, Latvian Radio reported on June 25.

The Court concluded that the contested level of GMI, along with other social assistance measures, does not ensure that any person can live in a state compatible with respectable human dignity.

Moreover, the Court was critical of the way in which the level of basic subsistence is calculated. The Constitutional Court stated that the level of GMI was determined not by any methodological justification, but by a political agreement between municipalities and the government in the form of the state budget.

The Court concluded that GMI was not determined on the basis of a method aimed at protecting human dignity, equalizing social inequality and ensuring the sustainable development of the country.

The Court decided that the contested rule would expire on January 1 2021 in order to give the Saeima and the government time to adopt a new legal framework.



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the Ombudsman Juris Jansons. He believes the allowance, which is €64 a month, is too small to provide food, housing and other basic needs. In contrast, the Cabinet considers that such a benefit may not be too close to the income received while working.

The guaranteed minimum income is a benefit for deprived persons. Personal income, along with the benefit, must reach minimum income level.

The Ombudsman considers that the allowance is too small to provide food, housing and other basic needs.

Moreover, the government has not used any methodology when calculating the amount of the benefit. In the proceedings, the Ombudsman shared an estimate. Food and housing alone would need around €300.

On the other hand, the Cabinet of Ministers' representative, Elina Celmiņa acknowledged that such a benefit should not be too close to the remuneration of the workers. It would demotivate people to work. And since Latvia is a country with relatively low incomes at European level, the government considers the benefit to be proportionate.

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## BNS/TBT staff

Estonian Minister of Rural Affairs Arvo Aller said it is unacceptable that direct support in the European Union differs up to three times in terms of size.

"The challenges facing the member states are just as great, as are the investments needed to tackle them. When participating in a single market that should be based on fair competition and where, as has been said today, all EU producers must comply with the same mandatory additional requirements," Aller said in a press release on June 29.

In his statement, Aller emphasized the need to take greater account of regional specificities. "For Estonia, for example, it would be important to include liming of acidic agricultural soils in the environmental and climate measures, with corresponding support from the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) budget," the minister said.

"Estonia does not support 2015 as

## Estonian minister: Nearly 3-fold difference in direct support in EU unacceptable



the reference year for the preservation of permanent grassland, which is too far from reality and does not convey the real situation of land use. As a proposal, we asked for the reference year to be 2018," he said.

In the field of fisheries, it is important for Estonia to move forward with the processing of the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund draft and to ensure equal treatment in the process, that is the

## harmonization of the maximum support rates for both small-scale coastal fishing and inland fishing.

"It is important to bring stability to the fisheries sector through greater flexibility in management plans and the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) regulation," Aller said.

The minister added that as a result of the drying up of the markets due to the health crisis, it is necessary to consider the transfer of catch quotas to the next year in a larger amount than has been the usual transfer rate.

More broadly, however, instead of a more capacity-based approach, the focus should be more on fisheries management, Aller said.

"In our opinion, investments on board fishing vessels fishing for different species under quotas and the modernization of the fleet will not

## Global Peace Index: global peacefulness has deteriorated over past year

LETA/TBT staff

Global peacefulness has deteriorated over the past year, with this being the fourth time in the last five years that the world has seen a fall in peacefulness, according to the latest Global Peace Index.

The results this year show that the level of global peacefulness deteriorated, with the average country score falling by 0.34 percent. This is the ninth deterioration in peacefulness in the last twelve years, with 81 countries improving, and 80 recording deteriorations over the past year.

The 2020 Global Peace Index reveals a world in which the conflicts and crises that emerged in the past decade have begun to abate, only to be replaced with a new wave of tension and uncertainty as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Iceland remains the most peaceful country in the world, a position it has held since 2008. It is joined at the top of the index by New Zealand, Austria, Portugal, and Denmark. Latvia is ranked 34th this year.

Afghanistan is the least peaceful country in the world for the second year in a row, followed by Syria, Iraq, South Sudan and Yemen. All, except Yemen, have been ranked amongst the five least peaceful since at least 2015.

Only two of the nine regions in the world became more peaceful over the past year. The greatest improvement occurred in the Russia and Eurasia region, followed by North America. North America was the only region to record improvements across all three domains, while Russia and Eurasia recorded improvements in Ongoing Conflict and Safety and Security, but a deterioration on the Militarization domain.

The report says that the world is now considerably less peaceful than it was at the inception of the index. Since 2008 the average level of country peacefulness has deteriorated 3.76 percent. There



have been year on year deteriorations in peacefulness for nine of the last twelve years. The fall in peacefulness over the past decade was caused by a wide range of factors, including increased terrorist activity, the intensification of conflicts in the Middle East, rising regional tensions in Eastern Europe and Northeast Asia, and increasing numbers of refugees and heightened political tensions in Europe and the United States.

The economic impact of violence on the global economy in 2019 was USD 14.5 trillion in purchasing power parity terms. This figure is equivalent to 10.6 percent of the world's economic activity (gross world product) or USD 1,909 per person. The economic impact of violence improved by 0.2 per cent from 2018 to 2019. The biggest improvement was in armed conflict.

Violence continues to have a significant impact on economic performance around the globe. In the ten countries most affected by violence, the average economic impact of violence was equivalent to 41 percent of GDP on average, compared to under four per cent in the countries least affected by violence. Syria, South

Sudan, Afghanistan and Venezuela incurred the largest proportional economic cost of violence in 2019, equivalent to 60, 57, 51 and 48 percent of GDP, respectively.

The report's Positive Peace research focuses on the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on Positive Peace. Positive Peace measures a country's ability to maintain peace. Falls in Positive Peace usually precede falls in peace. The impact of the pandemic, in particular its economic consequences, will likely have a severe impact on the way societies function. This impact could lead to deteriorations in Positive Peace and increase the risk of outbreaks of violence and conflict. Europe is likely to see an increase in civil unrest as the looming recession bites, while many countries in Africa will face famine conditions, creating further stress on many fragile countries.

The 2020 GPI report also has a special focus on the Ecological Threat Register (ETR), which combines a confluence of ecological risks with Positive Peace and economic coping capacity to better understand what future potential risks and fragilities nations will face in the next three decades.

## Warming of Baltic Sea waters favorable for Vibrio bacteria growth

BNS/TBT staff

Warming waters in the Baltic Sea are favorable for the growth of Vibrio bacteria, which may pose a threat of infection, Lithuania's Center for Communicable Diseases and AIDS (ULAC) warned on June 29.

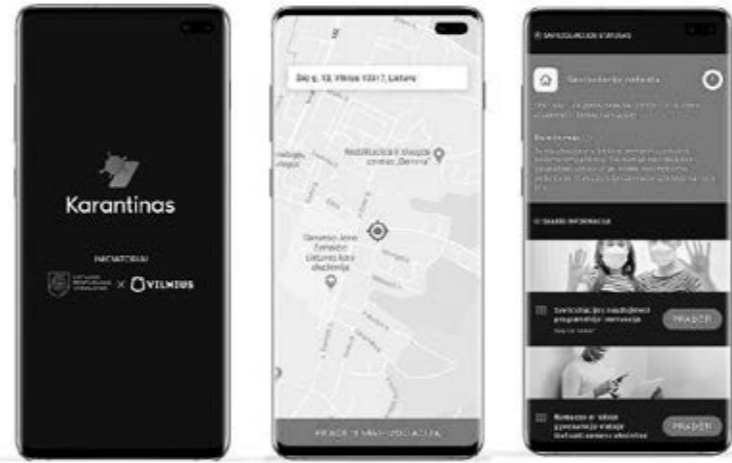
The center expects high levels of bacteria to be found in Klaipeda County and in Parnu, Estonia.

People can become infected with vibriosis when swimming in sea waters with a detected higher concentration of these bacteria, also when eating thermally untreated seafood.

The most frequent manifestations of vibriosis include watery diarrhea, abdominal cramping, nausea, vomiting, fever, and chills.



## Lithuania plans to acquire COVID-19 contact tracing app



BNS/TBT staff

Lithuania is planning to acquire a smartphone application to trace close contacts of coronavirus-infected people.

"Lithuania and the other two Baltic countries are developing these apps. We want to have that app, too. Procurement processes will be launched," Health Minister Aurelijus Veryga told LRT Radio on June 16, the last day of the nationwide coronavirus lockdown in Lithuania.

"It was developed on the platform of two large Internet teletech technology developers and allows tracing close contact," he said.

The minister said the contact tracing app could be available from

August and would be used on a voluntary basis.

Veryga also called on people to continue wearing facemasks in stores and other crowded public places, even though this will no longer be mandatory starting Wednesday.

Lithuania is on Wednesday lifting the nationwide quarantine put in place on March 16 in a bid to stem the spread of the coronavirus, but is extending a state of emergency declared in late February.

The Health Ministry said on Tuesday that three new coronavirus cases had been confirmed in Lithuania over the past 24 hours, bringing the country's total count to 1,776 cases.

## Latvia's Ralfs Nemiro will be KPV LV party's candidate for Riga mayor



LETA/TBT Staff

Former economics minister and current chairman of Saeima Economics, Agricultural, Environmental and Regional Policy Committee, Ralfs Nemiro will be KPV LV party's candidate for Riga mayor.

Nemiro's program will be based on improving the quality of life of the residents of Riga.

Nemiro claims that, as the economics minister, he achieved a reduction in electricity rates, suspended construction of Deglava Bridge that was not safe at that time, and significantly streamlined construction procedures in Riga, which neither the Riga City Council nor the past ministers had been able to accomplish.

"I see myself in Riga as a doer in the future as well - in these difficult times caused by the pandemic, Rigans' main concern is jobs. I will work with my team to eradicate

questionable outsourcing procedures at municipal institutions," says Nemiro, also promising to reduce utility bills and develop fair housing and energy policies, as well as beautify Riga neighborhoods.

The motto of KPV LV's program is "Know This: Riga is Your City", and it is based on three pillars - jobs, family, and respect for Rigans. KPV LV will pay great attention to transparent and well-thought-out management of municipal institutions and companies in the interest of Rigans. The party will also work to promote business activity in Riga, the city's export capacity and tourism, including restaurants, cafes, beauty salons, stores and entertainment venues, as well as support local producers.

The other leaders of Nemiro's team include Welfare Ministry's Parliamentary Secretary Kriss Lipsans, sociologist Julija Stare, and businessman Vasilij Nilovs.

## Lithuanian PM weighs in on president's first annual address



BNS/TBT staff

Lithuanian Prime Minister Saulius Skvernelis said on June 18 he saw President Gitanas Nausėda's wish to pool and unite both the nation and politicians, having listened to the president's 1st State of the Nation Address to the parliament.

"I see the wish and aspiration to unite and pool both the nation and politicians, which the president has sought since the start of his term," the prime minister told journalists on June 18.

Skvernelis said he also didn't hear criticism for the government, adding that the president's statement about the bar of political responsibility of high-ranking government officials lowered "to its lowest point" was "not only a matter of discussion and assessment of this term".

"I see no criticism. What was said in general about the system, everyone could apply it to oneself, I believe, and politicians have applied. I believe this annual address is a review of all key presidential areas, pooling and giving food for thought for the future," Skvernelis said.

Delivering his 1st State of the Nation Address earlier in the day, Nausėda said that the bar of political responsibility of government officials in Lithuania has been lowered to its lowest point.

"It is a shame that we have lowered the bar of political responsibility of high-ranking government officials to its lowest point. It appears that any action that is not punishable by imprisonment is just and lawful," Nausėda said in his first State of the Nation Address to the parliament.

The president did not name any specific politicians in his annual report, but he has been in a row with the ruling bloc in the last six months over possibilities for Transport Minister Jaroslav Narkevici to continue in his post.

"Everyone could wonder what the president had in mind. One should probably ask the president. It's not only a matter of discussion and assessment of this term," the prime minister said.

Asked to comment on the relations between the government and the president, Skvernelis said "all sorts of things have happened but it's natural" adding that the key things is that a dialogue is being sought.

Asked what he missed listening to the president's annual address, Skvernelis joked that he missed "praise for the government".

Under the Constitution, the president has a duty to deliver an annual address to the Seimas and provide a review of the situation in the country, its internal and foreign policies.

## NATO commander: rail Baltica will improve military mobility



BNS/TBT staff

Rail Baltica, a European standard gauge railway that will connect the Baltic countries with Poland, will also improve military mobility, according to the head of NATO's Allied Joint Force Command (JFC), Jörg Vollmer.

"It is a civil and not a military project but it will be beneficial for both purposes. It will benefit both parties as the project will be favorable for both the economy and military forces," he said in Vilnius on June 25.

Vollmer described Rail Baltica

as a key Baltic project to improve military mobility in the region.

The general also emphasized the need to adapt railways, roads, airports and seaports for military mobility. He noted, however, that the specific projects should be decided at the national level.

Lithuanian Defence Minister Raimundas Karoblis has previously spoken about the importance of Rail Baltica for troop mobility.

In May, he said the railway should comply with military equipment movement requirements.

## Estonia: Linnamae hydroelectric plant doesn't qualify as vital service provider

BNS/TBT staff

The Estonian Ministry of Economic Affairs and Communications said that the hydroelectric power plants of Jagala and Linnamae do not qualify as vital service providers.

In May, the rural municipality government of Joellahtme approached the ministry with a proposal to consider planning the introduction of Jagala and Linnamae hydroelectric power plants as sources of electricity production independent of external influences, which could also work autonomously in the event of possible crisis situations and as a possible evacuation gathering area near Tallinn.

In its response, the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Communications highlighted that the net capacity of a vital service provider power plant must be greater than 200 megawatts and have a significant impact on the operation of the electricity system in crisis situations. The capacity of the Jagala plant is 2 megawatts and the capacity of the Linnamae plant is 1.2 megawatts.

"Your hydroelectric power plant undoubtedly makes an important contribution to meeting Estonia's renewable energy targets and also to supplying electricity to the region. Power plants with a net capacity of 2 megawatts and 1.2 megawatts do not qualify as vital service providers and additional capacity would be needed in this area to create a separate evacuation area," the ministry said.

NGO Jagala Kalateed, among others, is opposed to electricity production at the Linnamae hydroelectric power plant and has supported the opening of the Jagala River as a spawning ground for Salmonidae fish.



"Currently, the circumstances concerning the special water use permit for Linnamae hydroelectric power plant are being clarified and an environmental impact assessment procedure is underway for damming and electricity production in the Natura area on the Jagala River. It has been established that damming and electricity generation by the Linnamae hydroelectric power plant has a negative impact on the integrity and protection objectives of the Natura 2000 network area," the NGO said in a press release.

Jagala Kalateed also pointed out that, according to the Environmental Impact Assessment and Environmental Management System Act, the government may give consent to allow activities with a negative impact in the Natura 2000 network area only for overriding and compelling reasons and in the absence of alternative solutions. This, in turn, requires compensatory measures to the extent of the damage caused to the environment.

At the end of last year, NGO Jagala Kalateed made a suggestion to Culture Minister Tonis Lukas that the minister should strip the dam of

the Linnamae hydroelectric power plant of the title of a cultural monument but the National Heritage Board responded negatively to the request as the authority believes the dam to be a unique object.

The dam of Linnamae hydroelectric power plant was declared a cultural monument in 2016. The cessation of the damming of Jagala River at Linnamae has been demanded by the Environmental Board and various associations related to fishermen, who believe that it would be possible to repopulate Salmonidae fish in the Jagala River by stopping the damming. According to the Environmental Board, this is a potentially excellent salmon river.

The rural municipality of Joellahtme, the Ministry of Culture and the National Heritage Board, among others, have spoken out against ceasing the damming and emptying the reservoir. The Ministry of Economic Affairs and Communications has also expressed support for the preservation of the Linnamae hydroelectric power plant and the Linnamae reservoir alongside it.

## Estonia: 23 MPs initiate bill to ban fur farms

BNS/TBT staff

Altogether 23 MPs on June 18 initiated a bill of amendments to the Animal Protection Act, which seeks to ban fur farms in Estonia by 2023.

Social Democratic Party (SDE) MP Jevgeni Ossinovski, who submitted the bill on behalf of the other MPs, said it is gratifying that there are more initiators this time than ever before. "Animal welfare issues are becoming more and more important to the Estonian people and this is also reflected in a much more positive attitude among members of the Riigikogu," Ossinovski said. "It is time to put an end to the cruel treatment of animals just to wear them on our backs or heads as a luxury! Not to mention the adverse environmental effects that this industry inevitably has," he added.

Reform Party MP Yoko Alender said that both the consumption choices of people and the sharp de-



cline in fur farming due to the lack of a market prove that, as a society, we no longer tolerate the industry or the torture of animals for profit or vain hat bobbles.

"A lot of namely small details -- key chains, pen tips and hat bobbles -- are made from the fur of animals slaughtered at fur farms. The

clothing industry has long offered alternative options without having to kill animals," Center Party MP Siret Kotka-Repinski said.

According to a Kantar Emor survey commissioned by NGO Loomus, altogether 69 percent of the people of Estonia are in favor of stopping the operation of fur farms.

## Linas JEJELEVICIUS

The opening of an open-air beach in Lukiskiu square in the heart of Vilnius has triggered a major firestorm, which perhaps can first be chalked off to the nearing parliamentary election in Lithuania in October.

The square is sacred to many for its vivid bloody history: tsarist Russia's general and governor of Vilnius, Mikhail Muravov, nicknamed "hangman" for his cruelty, hung Lithuanian insurgents against the tsarist regime in the square in 1863-1864. During the Soviet years, there stood a monument for Vladimir Lenin, the mastermind of the Great October Revolution in Russia. Its dismantling in the early 1990s embodies for many a new Lithuania, a free and democratic one.

Traditionalists fume that, by opening the Open Beach, the Vilnius authority spat into the face not only of the 1863-1864 insurgents but Lithuanian deportees, too – the Museum of Occupations and Freedom Fights, which was a KGB prison during the Soviet years, is just at a stone's throw.

Some Conservatives, like Laurynas Kasciunas, a hard-liner of the opposition Homeland Union – Lithuanian Christian Democrats, TS-LKD party, condemned it as a sacrilegious act, one besmearing the past.

Some of his party fellows, like Arvydas Anusauskas, historian and a prominent TS-LKD parliamentarian, endeavoured, however, to seek the golden mean in the combustible matter.

In his Facebook post, named „A political performance in the sand-box or the Open Beach“, Anusauskas, sounds more concerned about the perception of his party in the changing Lithuanian society and strived to show it as one most respecting the history and, at the same token, not fearing the modernity, however, not at the expense of those who perished in the square or nearby.

„The Conservatives are shown to the Liberal voter as some nearly extinct mouflons galloping in the mountains – ones very inconsiderate, reluctant to seek compromise, always with their horns stuck against others and, surely, unpredictable... We are being shown as someone who always wants to sobber with hands embracing the cross and who want to keep half of Vilnius' old edifices conserved forever," the PM said, addressing the issue of the party's image.

Meanwhile, modernists contest that and insist that Vilnius, and Lithuania, has to finally turn this bloody page of history and needs to enjoy the sweet fruits of the hard-fought freedom.

"I am very excited about the Open Beach and I fully support the idea. Our history is a history of freedom now and only having signified the symbols of our historic legacy in the context of today's actualities will we be able to understand how precious this freedom is," Tomas Vytautas Raskėvicius, Vilnius councillor and an open gay man, said

# Vilnius' Open Beach in the blood-soaked city is more than just that



"IT JUST FEELS WONDERFUL TO BE HERE. TRUCK-LOADS OF SAND POURED IN THE SQUARE, THE WOODEN PATHWAYS, THE LIFEGUARD TOWERS, THE CHANGING BOOTHS AND EVEN THE WARNING ABOUT SHARKS NEARBY GIVES A FEELING OF BEING IN A FAR-FLUNG HOLIDAY DESTINATION, CERTAINLY NOT IN VILNIUS. I PERSONALLY DO NOT THINK IT BESMEARS THE HISTORIC HERITAGE OF THE SQUARE, " A MIDDLE-AGE MAN, AN INHABITANT OF VILNIUS, WHO ADMITTED TO HAVING BEEN A VOTER OF TS-LKD, SAID.

before adding: „Freedom has to be celebrated through different manifestations, like this one, for example. Otherwise it will get suffocated by the shadows of the past.“

His opinion is echoed by many others who want to see Vilnius modern, groovy and, well, glancing more towards the future than the past. Remigijus Simasius, the Liberal mayor of Vilnius, undoubtedly leads the choir.

„The popular seaside resorts of Southern Europe are not easily accessible at the moment, and our Baltic Sea beaches will be overpacked this summer. That's why we needed a solution to help people recoup some of that vacation vibe on Vilnius' very own beach," Šimašius was quoted at the opening ceremony of the Open Beach.

But, interestingly, some say that beneath the ocean of acrimonious and sardonic remarks and accusations flaring now between the traditionalists and the liberals and their supporters lies a quintessential conundrum – is Vilnius not just set to tear off for good from the long-promulgated narrative of Lithuania as a country of tremendous sufferings and move to embracing a more modern, perhaps more hedonistic, and practical approach, at least towards the use of the city's public places, even those considered sacred?

"In a sense, I believe we can

speak of an ongoing cultural shift here. The mayor (Simasius) is striving to consolidate the modern Vilniusans, ones who are well-travelled and who are open to different cultures. They are not dependent on the narrative of the nation's sufferings and aches anymore," Arkadijus Vinokuras, a writer and a commentator of political life, said.

In his words, it does not mean that the Vilniusans do not respect the past.

"That means that they love life and want to live it to the fullest. People cannot be joyful if the tearful stories (about the tragic past) are retold over and over again. I am affirming this as a Lithuanian and a Jew," Vinokuras emphasised.

In terms of invasions, no other Lithuanian city has spilt more blood over the last two and a half centuries than Vilnius, the capital city. But having been trampled by the Napoleon army, the Russian and German empires, the Nazis, the Soviets and the Poles, Vilnius is now set to glance less over its shoulder to the past and focus on the future.

When the bright sun shines outside the window, the nearest beach is some 300 kilometers away and the COVID-19-caused confinement fear still deters people from driving so far, the Open Beach is a great idea for many Vilniusans of different ages and political affiliations.

Liberalu Sajudis (Liberal Movement), the party obviously tilted to a more liberal path, as did the entire Lithuanian society, especially in urban areas. So the party needs to rethink the shifts and get adjusted if it does not want to be known as an "eternally" opposition party," Kestutis Girnius, a political analyst, said.

Of 8 post-1990 Lithuanian governments, only two were formed by Conservatives.

"They have the acute issue of the (voting) "ceiling" – the center-left parties do not have it and Lithuanians tend to vote center-left mostly. The latter's prospects look better in the October election," Vytautas Dumbliauskas, associate professor of Mykolas Romeris University, said.

The Conservatives' presumed PM in the new government (Ingrida Simonyte) after the election has spoken out in favour of same-sex cohabitations, for example. Just another sign of the party's shift to liberalisation.

According to Vinokuras, unlike the older generation that traditionally vote right, Simasius and the young voters do not feel nostalgia for the past.

"Otherwise, we all would have to walk on tiptoes in Vilnius – its every slab has been soaked with blood over the centuries," he said. "Cultural change is impossible without a change of generations, and it is ongoing," he said.

But Alvydas Medalinskas, a political scientist and one of the spearheads of Sajudis, Lithuania's national movement in the 1990s, said: „Indeed, we can perhaps speak of the loss of memory about our historic past by part of our society and stronger hedonistic trends, but the Open Beach is a mere political gimmick, one aimed to rally supporters before the election...“

„I am convinced that as the mayor and a human being who is in charge of the city, he should have chosen another spot for it, definitely not the square that represents Vilnius and its history," Medalinskas said.

The Open Beach is equipped with tables and free wifi and has a large screen playing sea waves and relaxing sounds of the Baltic Sea, while in the evening the programme will include films, popular series and concerts.

No doubt, it, partly due to its ambiguous location, puts Vilnius back in the international limelight that the capital has enjoyed over the past months. First, it made it there for opening a huge drive-in cinema at the Vilnius airport and then, in an attempt to spur local business coping with the COVID-19 aftermaths, turning all public squares and streets in the Old City into open-air cafes and restaurants.

An edited version of the article first appeared on euronews.com

# Lithuanian environment agency investigates pollution incident in Baltic Sea

## BNS/TBT staff

The Lithuanian Environmental Protection Department says it is investigating a pollution incident in the Baltic Sea.

The incident was reported by the Lithuanian Navy on Monday, it said.

The ION M tanker was around 56 kilometers off the coast when it entered Lithuanian waters from Latvian waters, leaving behind an oil slick, a third of which was in Lithuanian waters.

The oil slick covered an area of around five square kilometers and was detected by the Sentinel satellite of the European Maritime Safety Agency.

The Navy dispatched a helicopter to inspect the site for possible pollution.

According to the Environmental



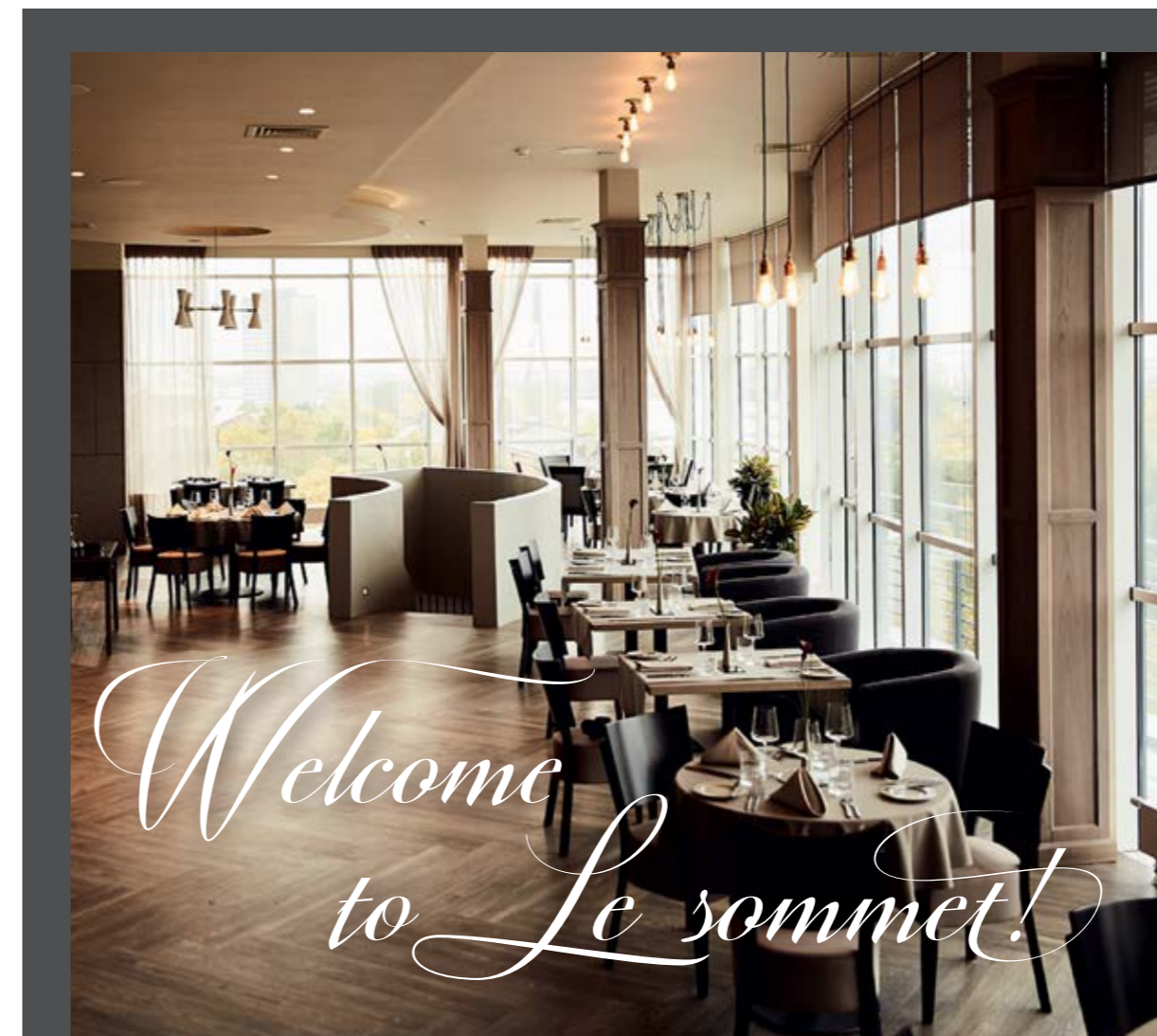
Protection Department, the Lithuanian Maritime Rescue Coordination Center informed Lithuania's authorities that the ship had previously transported palm oil, which is clas-

sified as a non-hazardous pollutant.

One of the possibilities investigated by the department is that the ship discharged cargo residues into the sea.

# Government endorses 5G development plan

The Lithuanian government on June 3 endorsed a 5G development plan until 2025. The aim is to deploy 5G in at least one of Lithuania's five biggest cities – Vilnius, Kaunas, Klaipėda, Šiauliai or Panevėžys – by 2022. By 2025, the 5G network should cover the country's key transport corridors and urban areas.



# Riga hopes to benefit from deployment of additional US troops in Poland



Latvian Defense Minister Artis Pabriks

## LETA/TBT staff

Latvian Defense Minister Artis Pabriks (For Development) hopes that the potential deployment of additional US troops in Poland will mean more frequent presence of the US troops in Latvia.

The minister told LETA that transatlantic unity, strengthening of European forces, bigger European defense budget and constant presence of the US are important factors for Latvia.

"Potential regrouping of the US forces towards the east is sensible and should be supported because the geopolitical situation has changed. Poland has an army consisting of four divisions and three are deployed in the western part of the country. We are under constant asymmetric threat. Thus, deploy-

ment of the US troops further to the east is positive," the minister said.

Pabriks said potential deployment of the US forces in Poland to some extent will also increase Latvia's defense capability because the Baltic states and Poland is a joint space. Pabriks also voiced hopes that this will mean more frequent presence of the US troops in military drills in Latvia.

As reported, after a meeting with Polish President Andrzej Duda earlier this month, US President Donald Trump announced that the US will move some of its troops from Germany to Poland.

"We're going to be reducing our forces in Germany. Some will be coming home and some will be going to other places, but Poland would be one of those other places," Trump said.



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## Lithuanian company planned to buy GIPL components from Russia



**BNS/TBT staff**

Alvora, a Lithuanian company building the Lithuanian-Polish gas pipeline (GIPL), planned to buy components from Russia's ChelPipe Group which supports the country's military infrastructure, the Lithuanian public broadcaster LRT reported on June 17.

Lithuania's gas transmission company Amber Grid says it has only recently learned about such a deal.

The energy minister says Alvora will not be allowed to enter into a contract with Russian producers. Alvora says the initial plan to work with an Italian company was affected by the coronavirus epidemic.

The LRT says Alvora signed a contract with Global Pipe Trade, a Swiss-registered company that is part of the Russian ChelPipe Group, in April. And Global Pipe Trade was renamed ChelPipe International in May.

Under the contract, components necessary for the GIPL gas pipeline would have been bought from a production facility in Chelyabinsk, Russia.

In 2016, Global Pipe Trade also supplied its products to Alvora for the construction of the Baltic-connector gas pipeline between Finland and Estonia. Tomas Sidlauskas, Alvora's CEO, says the company is also using equipment made by the Chelyabinsk production facility for other projects as well, not only in Lithuania.

In Lithuania, there's a special law requiring that deals related to

## Lithuania's SDPL rolls out Seimas candidate list



**BNS/TBT staff**

The presidium of the opposition Social Democratic Party of Lithuania on June 4 approved the party's preliminary candidate list for the upcoming Seimas election. The party's leader Gintautas Paluckas is the No 1 candidate on the list, followed by Rasa Budbergytė, elder of the party's political group

strategic objects should meet national security interests.

Nemunas Biknius, CEO at Amber Grid, said in late May he had no information that Alvora could buy products from companies having at least some links with Russia. The company said the value of these elements make 0.2 percent (around 150,000 euros) of the total project.

Sidlauskas says his company initially planned to buy from Italian company Allied International S.r.l but the plan was later affected by the coronavirus and the closure of all productions plants in Italy.

Lithuanian Energy Minister Zygimantas Vaiciunas says he learned about Alvora's deal with the Russian company in late May, adding that Amber Grid will not approve this deal.

Billionaire Andrey Komorov, one of the richest people in Russia, is chairman and a shareholder of ChelPipe Group.

In 2012, the company signed an agreement with the Russian Defense Ministry, on a military program to support the military units in the Sverdlovsk region where barracks were renovated and a modern gym was installed.

ChelPipe Group is also among suppliers of the controversial Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline between Russia and Germany.

Worth almost 80 million euros, excluding VAT, the GIPL contract with Alvora was signed in December, and the projects is scheduled to be completed by the end of 2021.

## Zalimas slams ruling bloc's statement as interference in Constitutional Court's activities

**BNS/TBT staff**

Dainius Zalimas, president of Lithuania's Constitutiona Court, dismissed on June 16 the ruling bloc's statement questioning his right to stay in the capacity after his term of office ended as "interference" in the court's activities and linked it to the ruling in that was unfavorable to the coalition.

"I regard this an impermissible interference in the activities of the Constitutional Court due to its decisions, and specifically the one made on Friday," Zalimas said.

"I am calling for an end to interference in the functioning of the independent judiciary, because (...) my powers as a judge and the court president have not expired," he added.

The ruling coalition's council said earlier on Tuesday that they had turned to President Gitanas Nausėda to voice their doubts as to whether the powers of Zalimas as the Constitutional Court's president could be extended after his term of office ended.

"Upon the expiration of his powers as the president, Zalimas did not appoint any other judge to temporarily perform the duties of the president of the Constitutional Court. The law does not provide for extending the powers of the president of the Constitutional Court until a new president is appointed for a full term of office," Ramunas Karbauskis, the leader of the Farmers and Greens Union, was quoted as saying in the coalition council's statement.

The ruling coalition's council pointed to an article of the Law on the Constitutional Court that



**Dainius Zalimas, president of Lithuania's Constitutional Court**

reads that "upon the expiration of the powers of the president of the Constitutional Court (...) the duties shall be temporarily performed by a judge appointed by the president of the Constitutional Court".

The law provides for a rotation of Constitutional Court judges. However, the parliament rejected all proposed candidates after the term of office of three Constitutional Court judges, including Zalimas, ended in March.

In the statement, the ruling bloc asks the president to "take on political leadership in ensuring that all the procedures provided for by the law are observed (...) so as to leave no doubt about the lawfulness of the performance of the duties of the president of the Constitutional Court".

Zalimas says, however, that his powers were automatically extended under the same law quoted by the council.

According to Zalimas, he had no obligation to appoint an interim president of the court.

"I will only be able to do so when I know when my powers are going to expire," he said.

The coalition council's statement came shortly after the Constitutional Court's ruling that an ad-hoc parliamentary inquiry commission that looked into a possible influence on decision-makers and political processes was set up in violation of the Constitution and its conclusions are unlawful.

The commission was headed by MP Agne Sirinskienė of the Farmers and Greens Union.

The Constitution provides for a rotation of Constitutional Court judges. However, the parliament has rejected all proposed candidates to replace three Constitutional Court judges, including Zalimas, whose term of office ended in March.

## Lithuanian parliament condemns Soviet occupation, calls for more education on consequences

**BNS/TBT staff**

The Seimas of Lithuania has on June 16 adopted a resolution stating that the Soviet Union occupied Lithuania 80 years ago and carried out terror and genocide, adding that it is important today to continue research into the period of armed anti-Soviet and anti-Nazi resistance and present their results to the public.

The resolution was backed by 114 members of the Seimas, there were no votes against and abstentions.

The document states that on June 15, 1940, when the Soviet Union occupied Lithuania, at least a tenth of its citizens and Polish citizens who were granted asylum in Lithuania fell victim to the Soviet Union's repressions.

"(...) the Soviets systemically sought to annihilate the lightest part of the Lithuanian nation and, thus, undermine the possibility for an independent state to be restored in the future," the resolution reads.

It also pays attention to the fact that the Russian Federation, which assumed the rights of the Soviet Union, does not recognize the fact of occupation so far and the damage it done, and there has been an increase



in attempts over the past decade to rewrite Lithuania's history by denying the fact of the Soviet occupation and tarnishing the memory of members of the resistance movement.

The resolution also states that the state must continue research into the period of armed anti-Soviet and anti-Nazi resistance and present their results to the public.

The Seimas also called on the government to actively support the work of calculating the damage done during the occupation by providing necessary funding, and demand compensation for occupation damages from Russia as it assumed the rights of the Soviet Union.

Prime Minister Saulius Skvernelis told journalists at the parliament on Tuesday that he backs the constant presence of the issue of compensation for occupation damage on the agenda.

"I believe we need to raise that issue and never forget it. That's the position of our state, taking a very long time ago," he said.

On June 15, 1940, the Soviet Union occupied Lithuania and annexed it, marking the start of the Soviet occupation periods that saw thousands of people tortured, deported and killed.

Lithuania restored an independent state on March 11, 1990.

## Lithuanian PM doesn't plan to revise 2020 budget



**Prime Minister Saulius Skvernelis**

**BNS/TBT staff**

Lithuania's 2020 state budget will not be revised, Prime Minister Saulius Skvernelis said on June 16, following the call from the opposition Conservatives to do so.

"The government is not planning to revise this year's state budget," he told reporters.

Vitas Vasiliauskas, the central bank governor, reiterated his position that the state's financial support for coronavirus-affected businesses and individuals should

be reflected in the budget, because "the figures are impressive".

Simonas Krepsta, an advisor to President Gitanas Nausėda, has also called for a review of the 2020 budget.

Skvernelis said in May that there was no need for a budget review as yet, but he did not rule out doing so later.

This year's central government budget projects 9.548 billion euros in annual revenue not including EU funds and 11.53 billion euros including EU funds.

## Extremists pose no major risks in Lithuania

**BNS/TBT staff**

Extremists do not pose any special threat to Lithuania's national security, Dainius Gaizauskas, the chairman of the Seimas Committee on National Security and Defense (CNSD) said on June 19.

"There some manifestations that are known and watched, but they are not posing any major risks to national security," Dainius Gaizauskas told reporters after the committee's meeting.

The State Security Department briefed the CNSD on activities of far-left and far-right activists and organizations in Lithuania.

"Of course, have both Antifa and neo-fascists. There are radical manifestations, but we are a small state where those radical manifestations are noticed rather quickly and the response is adequate. There are no risks," Gaizauskas said.

Kestutis Budrys, the intelligence agency's deputy director, refused to answer media questions after the meeting.

Laurynas Kasciunas, a member of the CNSD, said that extremists are trying to use some events as a platform for making themselves visible.

According to the MP, a Black Lives Matter rally in Vilnius on June 5 was one of such events.

Around 1,000 young people



**Dainius Gaizauskas, the chairman of the Seimas Committee**

took part in the demonstration to express solidarity with anti-racism protests in the US and around the world triggered by the death of African-American George Floyd at the hands of a police officer.

Outside the US embassy, the crowd were met by a group of coun-

ter-protesters who chanted "Freedom for Lithuania" and sang folk songs.

A minor scuffle broke out after a demonstrator tore a placard held by an anti-protester and knocked him onto the ground. The police have opened an investigation into the incident.

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# President: Lithuania must strive to become just, green, innovative welfare state

BNS/TBT staff

President Gitanas Nausėda says that Lithuania must strive to become "a just, green, innovative welfare state", a goal that requires more respect, dialogue and mutual trust.

"For three decades, the most important goal of all of us has been to return to where we were forcibly torn from - to the Western world in the political, cultural and economic sense of the word," Nausėda said in his first State of the Nation Address to the parliament on June 18.

"For three decades, we have sought to establish the country's international security so that the painful history of the past never happens again," the president said. "This process of building and improving the state is ever-going. Next to it, however, today we have set another great goal for Lithuania: a just, green, innovative welfare state," he added.

According to Nausėda, the welfare state begins "with respect, mutual trust, responsibility for the common interest and assistance to each other".

The president said he will patiently seek consensus on the further development of the state. "The only plan suitable for Lithuania is one that we will achieve by consensus," Nausėda said.



"I devoted the first year of my term to achieving more respect, trust, justice, responsibility and solidarity in Lithuania," he said.

Nausėda took office as Lithuanian president on July 12, 2019. He ran in the election on a welfare state platform focused on scaling down social exclusion and advocating greater respect in politics.

The three-month quarantine and restrictions on non-essential retail have changed Lithuanian shoppers' habits, a survey by Enterprise Lithuania suggests.

Every fifth Lithuanian bought more than usual online during the quarantine, and nearly a fifth of the respondents in the poll said they intended to continue shopping more online, the government export and business promotion agency said in a press release.

During this period, the scale of e-commerce in the Baltic states overall increased by 80 percent, while parcel deliveries in Lithuania grew by 54 percent, according to Enterprise Lithuania.

"Once the quarantine was announced, the usual shopping routine was disrupted as most brick and mortar shops had to be closed, visiting grocery stores and pharmacies became unsafe. For this reason, e-commerce attained great significance," says Inga Juozapavičienė of Enterprise Lithuania.

More women (22 percent) expanded their online shopping than men (17 percent), according to the survey.

At the same time, 9 percent of the respondents said they were shopping online less during the quarantine, which, according to Juozapavičienė, had to do with financial uncertainty. The results also show that as many as 41 percent do not shop online at all.

"This indicates that a part of the Lithuanian population still lacks skills in using digital technologies, people are still afraid of changes and innovation, and, at the same time, this shows the existence of a huge untapped e-commerce market," Enterprise Lithuania said in the press release.

The Luminor bank, which has analysed customer payment flows, suggests that cash payments fell 30 percent in the Baltic states during the quarantine, while online commerce grew by about 80 percent.

"The most significant growth was in Estonia and Lithuania, but this is because in Latvia, e-commerce had been commonly used by bank customers even before the quarantine," the bank's representative Diana Kačanauskaitė is quoted in the press release.

Small and medium-sized businesses surveyed by Luminor plan to expand their online commerce activities (30 percent) and use social networks for marketing (20 percent). Deliveries of goods to end-users have jumped significantly, according to DPD Lithuania spokesman Gabrielius Bilevičius.

"Before the quarantine, the ratio of business-to-customer and business-to-business segments were 30 to 70, but this ratio reversed to 40:60 during the quarantine," Bilevičius says, adding that while it may not stay this way in the long run, the figures will not return to the pre-quarantine levels either.

The poll was conducted by Spinter Tyrimai on May 18-27. It involved 1,012 respondents aged 18 to 75 from across Lithuania.

transportation (and) repatriation of people stuck all over Europe and also outside of Europe, and it is something we really want to avoid," the Latvian foreign minister said.

"Now that we in Europe are more or less doing OK, it is important that we do not rush when it comes to opening borders on political criteria and that we do it based on purely scientific and epidemiological criteria," he added.

Estonia's top diplomat, Urmas Reinsalu, said the key lesson learned from the COVID-19 pandemic "is that the speed of action is crucial".

"If you lose tide, you lose. Europe was the epicenter was a month ago. Now it has changed, but we have to be very, very careful in reopening the movement of people for Schengen countries and we should be always ready for a negative scenario," he said.

Polish Foreign Minister Jacek Czaputowicz said, "Our records are much better than in other countries in European Union, because our governments worked efficiently and took good decisions."

"Now it is time for solidarity and cooperation, because no country alone can fight COVID-19," he told the news conference.

# Baltics, Poland ready for more coordinated response if 2nd coronavirus wave hits

LETA/BNS/TBT staff

The Baltic states and Poland are ready for a more coordinated response if a second coronavirus wave were to occur, the four countries' foreign minister said after meeting in Vilnius on June 15.

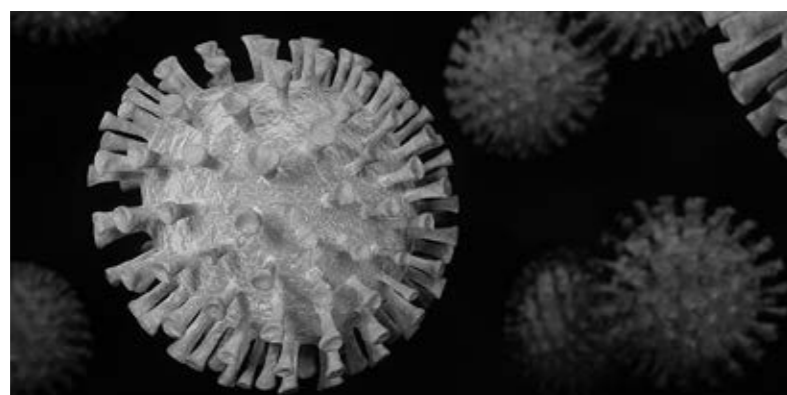
"We demonstrate by our own example that more coordination is possible and necessary," Lithuania's Linas Linkevičius told a joint news conference.

Although each country acted on its own when the crisis hit, "we should at least exit it in a coordinated way", the foreign minister said.

"If a second wave comes, God forbid, we keep saying that we should be better prepared for it," he added.

Latvia's Edgars Rinkevics said the first wave of the pandemic highlighted the need for greater coordination in making decisions on border closures and repatriation of citizens.

"Now we're all clever (and understand) that we have to have more coordination when it comes to border closures, international



# Court opens Paleckis' case

BNS/TBT staff

The Regional Court of Šiauliai, northern Lithuania, has on June 1 opened the case of Algirdas Paleckis, a former Lithuanian politician suspected of spying for Russia. He is suspected to have acted for the benefit of a foreign country in an organised group with businessman Deimantas Bertauskas.

Prosecutors say that the defendants, acting in an organized group with an employee of Russian intelligence and other Russian citizens, including one found guilty in the January 13 case in Lithuania, allegedly collected information of interest for Russian intelligence in Lithuania for monetary and other remuneration.



Lithuania for monetary and other remuneration.

# Quarantine boosts e-commerce, though 40 percent of Lithuanians still don't shop online



LRT.lt

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# Latvian subsidiary of Estonia's Merko to build business complex in Riga for EUR 48 million

LETA/BNS/TBT staff

SIA Merks, part of the listed Estonian construction group Merko Ehitus, has entered into a contract with SIA Hanzas 14, owned by Capitalica Baltic Real Estate Fund I, for the construction of the business complex Verde in Riga with a total cost of 48 million euros.

The works of the first stage include construction of an office building and an underground parking lot with a total area of 29,500 square metres. The contract value is more than 31 million euros, plus value added tax, Merko told the stock exchange.

Construction works of the first stage will start in July and are scheduled to be completed in the first quarter of 2022.

The start of the construction of the second stage will be decided



within 12 months. The second stage includes an office building with a total area of 15,600 square metres and the construction period is approximately 15 months. The contract value is more than 17

million euros, plus value added tax. SIA Merks is a Latvian construction company, which offers construction services in the fields of general construction, civil engineering and residential construction.

# Isamaa leader says Estonia's features must be visible in economic recovery plan

BNS/TBT staff

It's important for the features of Estonia to be visible in the European Union's plan for economic recovery, chairman of Isamaa party Helir-Valdor Seeder said on June 12.

Seeder described it as positive that the European Commission is looking for ways how to restart the European economy, spokespeople for Isamaa said.

"An effective European Union that is acting together is the best solution for solving also the current crisis. At the same time, we must be honest about it that there are more questions than answers today when it comes to the economic recovery plan," Seeder said.

Seeder, chairman of the smallest of the three parties of the government coalition, said that the position determined by the government concerning the economic recovery plan is balanced.

Isamaa is of the opinion that the plan must be consistent with the EU treaties, it must not entail future Europe-wide taxes, the investments must support innovation, environ-



ment-friendly technologies and the competitiveness of European businesses, and all the obligations assumed must be declared transparently and be reflected in the debt burden of the member states.

Seeder added that the plan for economic recovery is a clever initiative in that it offers something to everyone.

"To the southern countries a

cheap loan is offered with a common EU guarantee, to countries of Eastern Europe it is said that you will be getting more than you pay in, while the big core nations will definitely like increasing protectionism, which they will gain from. While such temptation is difficult to resist, for us it's important that Estonia's features were visible in that plan," Seeder added.

# Neo-Nazi suspect attempted a terror attack in Lithuania



LRT.lt/en

Police in Lithuania arrested a neo-Nazi suspect last year who tried to commit a terror attack, the country's prosecutors said on June 26.

A pre-trial was launched in October 2019 when an improvised explosive device was found next to the Western Union offices in the Lithuanian capital. The suspect had sprayed FK DIVISION and SIEGE graffiti, as well as a swastika.

Lithuania's anti-terror police unit, ARAS, neutralised the device which was found to contain an equivalent of 2.5 kilograms of explosives. The explosion would have shattered windows as far as several hundred metres away, according to police.

The suspect is a Lithuanian national born in 1999. According to the investigation, he is aligned with the neo-Nazi Feurkrieg Division group.

In recent years, law enforcement across the world have largely dismantled the extremist group, which adheres to the writings of a known American neo-Nazi, James Mason.

During the police raids, a large amount of explosives were found belonging to the suspect, as well as other chemicals that can be used to manufacture explosive devices.

An improvised firearm was also found, as well as other gun parts that are prohibited by Lithuanian laws.

Various other extremist symbols and literature, including Adolf Hitler's Mein Kampf, were confiscated during the police searches.

Head of Lithuania's ARAS, Viktoras Grabauskas, said if the device had gone off, it would have inflicted serious damage.

The device failed to explode due to "a lack of knowledge" by the suspect, he added. The explosive device was manufactured according to instructions published online by terrorists, said Grabauskas.

Lithuanian police said the person had already been under surveillance for his radical views. There are no other suspects in the investigation.

"Of course we are always monitoring [...] the internet ad we see ultra ring-wing movements [and] activities, and certain preventative measures are being applied," Arūnas Paulauskas from the Lithuanian general commissariat told reporters on Friday.

"The motive [...] was a form of protest against the global order, globalism," said Paulauskas, adding that it likely formed the basis for targeting the Western Union building.

The suspect planned to commit other acts of terror, he added.

Rolandas Kiškis, from the criminal police unit, said the device was laid at night, but was intended to go off in daytime when there would have been people present at the site.

The suspect was a student in Vilnius, but had already dropped out at the time of the attempted attack.

Kiškis said "it's a fact" he was in touch with people from abroad.

Lithuania's intelligence service, the State Security Department (VSD), said the threat of a terror attack in the country remains low.

This year, there have been no reports about extremist organisations or lone actors aiming to commit attacks, according to the VSD.



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Nina L. KHRUSHCHEVA

The death of George Floyd, an unarmed and handcuffed black man, at the hands – or, more accurately, the knee – of a police officer in Minneapolis ignited massive protests across the United States against systemic racism and police brutality. It also spurred a growing number of people outside the US to confront the legacies of racism and inequality in their own countries. Donald Trump's administration, however, is doing no such thing.

Instead, the Trump administration has continued – even accelerated – its effort to hollow out America's institutions in favor of a nihilistic populism. Its ultimate goal remains unchanged: to create a full-fledged illiberal regime in the US.

No one is more committed to this dream than William Barr, Trump's attorney general. Barr may not have the foggiest idea who Antonio Gramsci was; Trump almost certainly doesn't. But Barr's lust for power and Trump's feral cunning seem to have led the two men to intuit the Italian Marxist philosopher's theory of cultural hegemony: the idea that the ruling class gains society's consent to the *status quo* by ensuring that a country's institutions embody and promote a legitimating ideology.

Schools, courts, religious institutions, and the media, for example, can play a powerful role in the internalization of norms, values, and beliefs. Trump, Barr, and US Republicans more generally have used all of these institutions. But, in response to the ongoing protests, the Trump administration has gone a step further, deploying law enforcement and even the military to advance their ideological ends.

On June 1, Barr – who, it is said, relishes the “general” in his job title – ordered the expansion of the protective perimeter that had been set up around the White House. Officers fulfilled that mission – which involved clearing peaceful protesters from Lafayette Park, the site of many important protests in America's history – using tear gas, smoke bombs, pepper spray, police batons, horses, and riot shields.

## IIHF's Ice Hockey World Championships in Riga and Minsk will start two weeks later

### LETA/TBT staff

The International Ice Hockey Federation (IIHF) officially announced on Friday, June 26, that next year's Ice Hockey World Championships in Riga and Minsk will start two weeks later than initially planned.

The tournament will kick-off on May 21, instead of May 7, with the final to take place on June 6.

# The long march of “general” William Barr



TRUMP THEN WADDLED ACROSS THE EMPTIED PARK IN ORDER TO BE PHOTOGRAPHED AWKWARDLY HOLDING A BIBLE IN FRONT OF ST. JOHN'S CHURCH. BARR STOOD PROUDLY NEARBY, ALONGSIDE A REAL GENERAL, MARK MILLEY, THE CHAIRMAN OF THE JOINT CHIEFS OF STAFF, WHO, AFTER A TIDAL WAVE OF CRITICISM, SUBSEQUENTLY EXPRESSED REGRET FOR HAVING PARTICIPATED.

Trump then waddled across the emptied park in order to be photographed awkwardly holding a Bible in front of St. John's Church. Barr stood proudly nearby, alongside a real general, Mark Milley, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, who, after a tidal wave of criticism, subsequently expressed regret for having participated. “My presence in that moment and in that environment,” Milley acknowledged, “created a perception of the military involved in domestic politics.” In fact, it was worse than that: the stunt called into question the US military's 240-year-old tradition of remaining strictly apolitical.

Trump insists that his politicization of the military is a matter of upholding “law and order” – a phrase that harks back to Richard Nixon, another tough-talking US

president with autocratic aspirations. Though the demonstrations have been mostly peaceful, Trump claims that using force against protesters is actually an “act of compassion,” because it supposedly “saves lives.” Antonio Gramsci, meet George Orwell.

Former senior US military leaders see through the Trump administration's deceit and have condemned the Lafayette Square stunt. General James Mattis, Trump's own former secretary of defense, said this “abuse of executive authority” made “a mockery” of the US Constitution. Over 1,000 former justice department officials published a letter requesting an internal review of Barr's handling of the protests.

But both Barr and Trump are as committed as ever to their pursuit of illiberal cultural hegemony. Trump

BUT BOTH BARR AND TRUMP ARE AS COMMITTED AS EVER TO THEIR PURSUIT OF ILLIBERAL CULTURAL HEGEMONY. TRUMP HAS DEMONIZED PROTESTERS, INCLUDING BY TOUTING THE ABSURD CONSPIRACY THEORY THAT A 75-YEAR-OLD PROTESTER WHOM POLICE WERE CAUGHT ON CAMERA SHOIVING TO THE GROUND WAS AN “ANTI-FIFA PROVOCATEUR.” HE ALSO ATTEMPTED TO DEPLOY 10,000 ACTIVE-DUTY TROOPS IN THE STREETS OF WASHINGTON, DC, TO “DOMINATE” THE DEMONSTRATORS, WHOM HE CALLS “THUGS.”

has demonized protesters, including by touting the absurd conspiracy theory that a 75-year-old protester whom police were caught on camera shoving to the ground was an “Anti-fifa provocateur.” He also attempted to deploy 10,000 active-duty troops in the streets of Washington, DC, to “dominate” the demonstrators, whom he calls “thugs.”

Likewise, Barr has played up the violence, claiming – without any evidence – that “far-left extremist groups” are stoking it. And he actually *did* deploy his own “army”: federal correctional officers – trained in quelling prison riots, not managing peaceful protests – who wore black clothes without badges or other insignia.

There is, however, a key difference between Trump and Barr. The former is a reality-TV autocrat content to think that pretending to be strong makes him strong, even as he hides in a bunker and behind an impossibly high security fence. (Having been born in Russia, I am all too familiar with a president who hides behind high walls that are supposed to symbolize power, but actually betray the state's fear of civil society.)

Barr, by contrast, is a determined apparatchik. While Trump asserts that his authority is “absolute,” Barr is dedicated to carrying out the “long march through the institutions” – in the words of Rudi Dutschke, the 1960s German radical leader who studied Gramsci's work – required to make that claim true. This has meant, for example, undermining Special Counsel Robert Mueller's investigation into Russia's interference in the 2016 presidential election, and forcing federal prosecutors to drop their case against Trump's first national security

adviser, General Michael Flynn. His latest assault on democracy is the dismissal of US Attorney Geoffrey Berman, a Manhattan-based federal prosecutor who has investigated several of Trump's associates.

Barr has not corrupted his office and chipped away at executive accountability and transparency merely out of personal loyalty to Trump. His motivations are ideological. As a staunch proponent of the theory of a unitary executive, he wholeheartedly subscribes to the view that a president's power is all-encompassing. By this logic, Trump has the right to gut any investigation into his actions, and congressional oversight of the presidency should be severely curtailed. Barr's “chilling vision of unchecked presidential power,” as the journalist Damon Linker calls it, is akin to that of Carl Schmitt, the Nazis' favorite legal philosopher.

General Barr is thus a true *Gauleiter*. And, under Trump, he has been given the ultimate opportunity to implement his ideology, whatever the consequences for America's constitutional order. I suspect that even Gramsci would be stunned by how openly Barr has deployed the “apparatus of state coercive power” to enforce “discipline on those groups who do not ‘consent’ to Trump's – and Barr's own – hegemony.

Nina L. Khrushcheva is Professor of International Affairs at The New School. Her latest book (with Jeffrey Taylor) is *In Putin's Footsteps: Searching for the Soul of an Empire Across Russia's Eleven Time Zones*. Copyright: Project Syndicate, 2020 [www.project-syndicate.org](http://www.project-syndicate.org)

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United States, Germany, Norway, Italy and Kazakhstan. Meanwhile, Group A, which will be played in Minsk, will be made up of hosts Belarus, Russia, Sweden, the Czech Republic, Switzerland, Slovakia, Denmark and Great Britain. Minsk will host two quarter-final games, both semi-finals and the medal games.

on June 5, granting asylum to Hong Kong people who face political persecution and repressions from China. A draft resolution expressing concern

over Beijing's plan to impose a new national security law in Hong Kong has been registered by 36 Lithuanian lawmakers. Last week, the Chinese

parliament backed a proposal to bypass the Hong Kong legislature and impose a new national security law in the semi-autonomous territory.

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Shashi THAROOR

COVID-19 isn't the only threat that has crossed India's borders this year. According to alarming reports from India's defense ministry, China has deployed a “significant number” of troops across the disputed Line of Actual Control (LAC) along the countries' Himalayan frontier. So far, these transgressions have occurred at four points on the world's longest and most highly disputed border, with thousands of Chinese troops showing up in Sikkim and in parts of the Ladakh region, northeast of the Kashmir Valley.

Neither government disputes the fact that Chinese soldiers have occupied territory that India considers its own. Notwithstanding a brief but bloody war in 1962 that ended with the humiliation of India's underprepared army, China and India have managed an uneasy but viable *modus vivendi* on their common border for nearly half a century.

No shots have been fired in anger since 1976, and both countries tend to downplay each other's troop movements, citing “differing perceptions” as to where the LAC – which has never been officially demarcated – actually lies.

Owing to these fraught conditions, an estimated 400 faceoffs occur each year along the LAC, all of which are quickly defused. But this time is different. Chinese troops have reportedly advanced into territories that China itself traditionally considers to be on the Indian side of the divide. And rather than merely patrolling, they have established a fixed presence (with pitched tents, concrete structures, and several miles of road) well beyond China's own “Claim Line,” occupying the “Finger Heights” near Pangong Tso Lake.

Obviously, these encroachments have met with resistance. Last month alone, there were two physical clashes between Indian and Chinese soldiers, with brawls resulting in dozens of injuries on both sides. Though the two armies had a similar standoff on Bhutan's Doklam Plateau in 2017, that was in a third country. This time, India has every reason to interpret China's incursion as direct aggression.

True, the Doklam standoff ended with a Chinese climbdown, as did a similar episode in the same part of Ladakh during Chinese President Xi Jinping's first visit to India in 2014. But the China of 2020 is stronger, more assertive, and eager

## Group of Lithuanian MPs propose granting asylum to Hong Kong people

### BNS/TBT staff

on June 5, granting asylum to Hong Kong people who face political persecution and repressions from China. A draft resolution expressing concern

# China's “Peaceful Rise” vanishes in thin air



The cremation ceremony of an Indian soldier killed in a border clash with China, Maner, India, June 2020

BECAUSE INDIA'S GOVERNMENT CANNOT AFFORD TO TAKE CHINA'S LATEST AGGRESSION LYING DOWN, IT IS REPORTEDLY ALREADY PREPARING FOR A LONG STANDOFF. INDIAN PRIME MINISTER NARENDRA MODI'S NATIONALIST “STRONGMAN” REGIME, ESPECIALLY, CANNOT RISK LOSING FACE BEFORE INDIA'S EASILY INFLAMED PUBLIC. BUT EVEN UNDER A DIFFERENT GOVERNMENT, INDIA WOULD HAVE A STRONG INTEREST IN PROVING TO WOULD-BE AGGRESSORS – NOT LEAST PAKISTAN – THAT IT IS NO PUSHOVER.

to throw its weight around in a new era of Sino-American “decoupling.” It will be less inclined to withdraw unilaterally this time.

Still, the world is taking notice. Recent statements by US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and Russia both expressed growing concern, despite Chinese officials' statement that the situation is “overall stable and controllable.”

But the problem is not that China is planning an all-out war or a major military campaign. Rather, it is using “salami tactics”: minor military incursions that inflict small-scale military setbacks on India. Most likely, the Chinese will occupy a few square kilometers of territory for “defensive” purposes, and then declare peace. This ap-

proach is nothing new, and it poses a test of India's resolve. Because India's government cannot afford to take China's latest aggression lying down, it is reportedly already preparing for a long standoff. Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's nationalist “strongman” regime, especially, cannot risk losing face before India's easily inflamed public. But even under a different government, India would have a strong interest in proving to would-be aggressors – not least Pakistan – that it is no pushover. To be sure, China may argue that it was provoked by India's infrastructure construction along the LAC. But these projects are long overdue. Two summers ago, the Indian parliament's External Af-

WITH THE WORLD'S ATTENTION FOCUSED ON THE PANDEMIC, CHINESE TROOPS HAVE BEEN ESTABLISHING FIXED POSITIONS IN AREAS THAT EVEN IT CONSIDERS TO BE ON THE INDIAN SIDE OF THE DISPUTED LINE OF ACTUAL CONTROL. THE MESSAGE IS CLEAR: CHINA IS NOW THE REGION'S PREPONDERANT POWER, AND EVERYONE ELSE SHOULD FALL IN LINE.

gion. The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, one of the crown jewels of Xi's Belt and Road Initiative, runs through portions of Pakistan-occupied Kashmir that even China acknowledges as disputed territory.

China also continues to reiterate its claims to Indian territory directly, particularly the northeastern state of Arunachal Pradesh, which it describes as “South Tibet.” Against this backdrop, episodes like the current standoff should be understood as part of a larger strategy of keeping India in check.

Indian foreign-policy analysts understand this, warning that, because the latest act of Chinese belligerence clearly marks a shift in the longstanding status quo at the border, it augurs the end of China's self-proclaimed “peaceful rise.” Under Xi, China seems much more willing to demonstrate openly that it is the region's preponderant power.

By taking a tough stand on the Indian border, China hopes to show the world, especially the United States, that it is not intimidated by Donald Trump's bluster, and that other Asian countries should fall into line.

For now, Indian officials have announced that high-level military talks with China have produced an agreement that the two sides will “peacefully resolve the situation in the border areas in accordance with various bilateral agreements.” But, as the standoff has made clear, each side has a very different understanding of what those bilateral agreements mean. It remains to be seen whether China will actually withdraw its troops from the disputed areas. The devil, as always, is in the details.

Clearly, India and China need to finalize a permanent border agreement. China has long argued that a formal border settlement is best left to future generations, but that is because its geopolitical power – and therefore its negotiating position – grows stronger with each passing year.

China is betting that the longer a settlement is deferred, the more likely it is to get the border it wants. In the meantime, it will use limited acts of aggression along the LAC to keep India off balance.

Shashi Tharoor, a former UN under-secretary-general and former Indian Minister of State for External Affairs and Minister of State for Human Resource Development, is an MP for the Indian National Congress. He is the author of *Pax Indica: India and the World of the 21st Century*.

The interview is provided by [www.project-syndicate.org](http://www.project-syndicate.org) in cooperation with The Baltic Times





Andrew SHENG



Xiao GENG

Longstanding and bipartisan pretensions of American exceptionalism, rising domestic concerns, and a lack of policy clarity suggest that, even if Donald Trump is voted out in November, the US-led cooperation the world needs will not soon emerge. But another four years of Trump would almost certainly make matters worse.

Former US National Security Adviser John Bolton's new book *The Room Where It Happened* bills itself as "the most comprehensive and substantial account" of President Donald Trump's administration. And, indeed, it has quickly become a critical resource for those seeking to understand Trump. But, despite Bolton's juicy revelations about Trump's conduct of foreign policy (which his administration tried in vain to keep off bookshelves), the book does little to answer the fundamental question facing the US: Is its current foreign-policy muddle Trump's fault, or the result of something deeper and more structural?

There is no doubt that Trump's leadership is problematic, even dangerous. A longtime Washington insider, Bolton assumed that, as national security adviser, he would be responsible for ensuring that the president "understood what options were open to him for any given decision," and that the decision would then be "carried out by the pertinent bureaucracies."

But Trump was not interested in an orderly calculation of policy priorities and trade-offs. Nor was he much interested in policy implementation. Managing the different agendas, interests, and egos of America's complex bureaucratic machinery – including the State Department, the Pentagon, the Treasury, and intelligence agencies – is barely on his radar.

Trump's own ego – inextricably linked to his re-election – was all that mattered, according to Bolton, to the point that he was willing to make what Bolton considered imprudent deals with other countries just to claim a victory. Eventually, Bolton writes, he couldn't take it anymore and resigned. (Trump still insists that he fired Bolton.)

Trump's temperamental, transactional approach to foreign affairs – which has included praising dictators, withdrawing from multilateral agreements, and tweeting wild threats whenever he has felt cornered – has caused considerable confusion among America's allies and rivals alike (not to mention US officials and bureaucrats). Not surprisingly, it has severely under-

mined America's standing on the world stage.

Yet America's global standing was weakening long before Trump arrived. Its position as a superpower depends on its economic influence, technological prowess, financial dominance, and military might. But its interest in – and approach to – global leadership has always been shaped by its self-perception as a moral authority, bearing universal values that others should adopt as their own.

The problem, which the strategist George Friedman has pointed out, is that "most nations don't adhere to American moral standards." That is certainly true of China, which has its own set of values and priorities. This divergence has contributed substantially to the conclusion in the US that China is the country's main strategic rival.

That notion has wide bipartisan support in the US. In fact, Trump's Democratic predecessor, Barack Obama, also sought to shift America's strategic focus toward managing China's rise – albeit far less combatively than Trump – but was thwarted by continued upheaval in the Middle East.

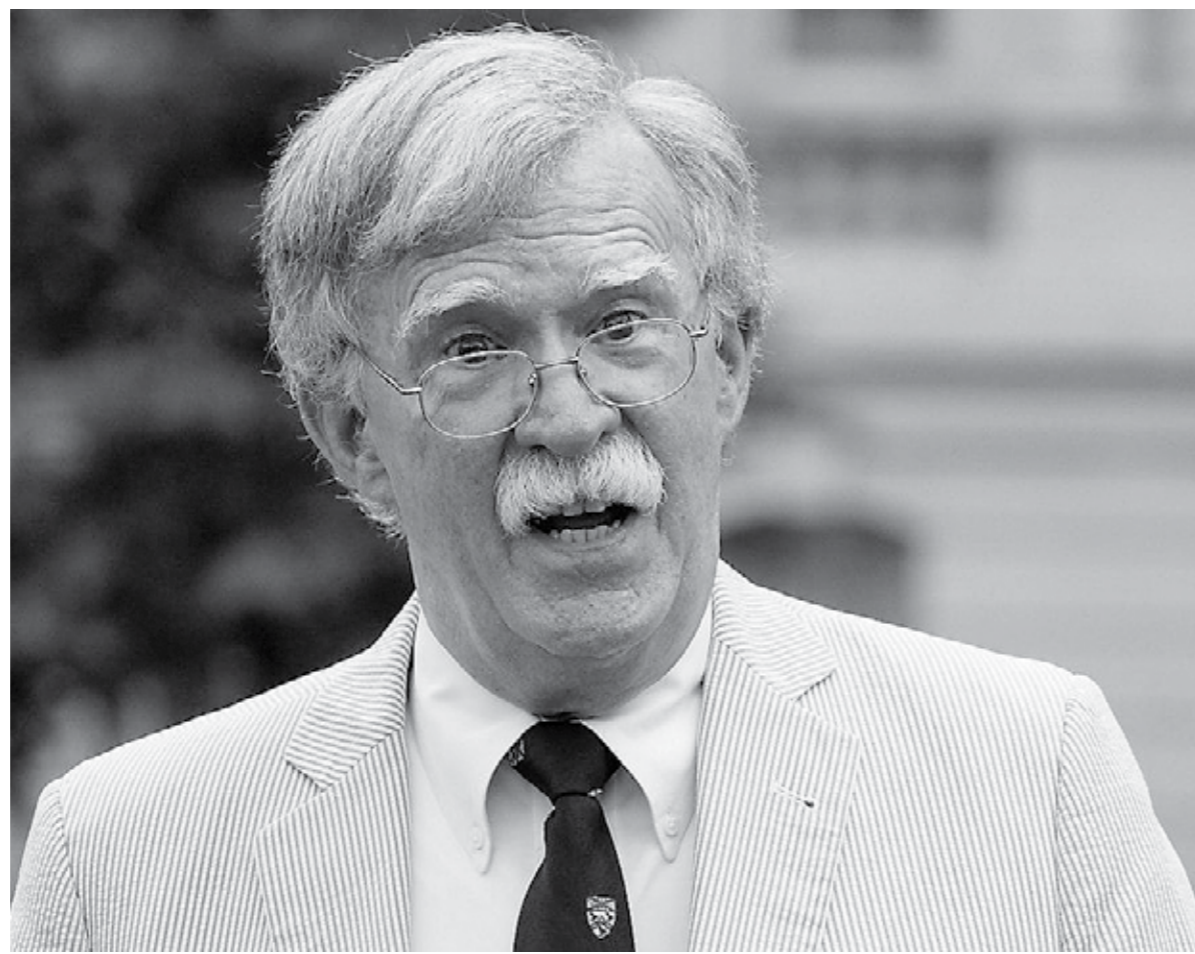
As Richard N. Haass has argued, Trump's presidency has been marked by divisions not so much on whether to pivot toward the Pacific, withdraw from the Middle East morass, or rethink relations with Russia, but on how to do so. Still, Trump's highly divisive, antagonistic style has all but precluded any consensus, particularly with regard to China. What is left is a knee-jerk repudiation of all things Chinese.

Escaping this muddle will not be easy. America's global standing depends on a strong economy. And yet the COVID-19 pandemic has caused some 40 million Americans to file for unemployment benefits, and the Federal Reserve projects that many will remain out of work for a prolonged period. It does not help that long-simmering social divisions are boiling over, exemplified by widespread protests over systemic racism and police violence.

Americans and their leaders are now increasingly fixated on domestic challenges. As a result, Haass notes, "much is happening in the world that calls out for American attention and is not getting it."

For one thing, as long as COVID-19 survives anywhere, countries that have eliminated it will continue to suffer from additional waves of infection. Yet the US has been unable to manage the crisis

# The American muddle



FORMER US NATIONAL SECURITY ADVISER JOHN BOLTON'S NEW BOOK *THE ROOM WHERE IT HAPPENED* BILLS ITSELF AS "THE MOST COMPREHENSIVE AND SUBSTANTIAL ACCOUNT" OF PRESIDENT DONALD TRUMP'S ADMINISTRATION. AND, INDEED, IT HAS QUICKLY BECOME A CRITICAL RESOURCE FOR THOSE SEEKING TO UNDERSTAND TRUMP.

at home: more than 120,000 Americans have died, and cases continue to rise at a rate of over 25,000 per day.

The US cannot recapture the hegemonic global leadership of the past, and it shouldn't try. The world is shifting toward a multipolar order, in which, as Harvard's Joseph S. Nye has explained, power is diffused among multiple nation-states, multinational corporations, non-state actors, and diverse communities (in terms of race, gender, religion, and culture). At the same time, challenges are becoming increasingly global in nature, with the pandemic being a case in point.

For the US, the rational response would be to lead a cooperative effort to address shared challenges, including the looming recession, technological disruption, and climate change. For this to work, all stakeholders – including US rivals like China, Russia, and Iran – must be involved.

Trump has proved himself to

be anything but rational. But longstanding and bipartisan pretensions of moral exceptionalism, the perception of China as a strategic competitor, rising domestic concerns, and a lack of policy clarity suggest that, even if he is voted out in November, the US-led cooperation the world needs will not soon emerge.

That is the message China has received, at least. And just as the US fears foreign interference in its elections, China, viewing internal stability and national security as vital to its development, fears foreign interference in its domestic affairs. Given this, the US-China rivalry will probably not wane any time soon.

Nonetheless, as Bolton's book makes plain, Trump remains uniquely ill-suited to national, much less global, leadership. As the US approaches its next presidential election, voters should recall President Dwight D. Eisenhower's

famous assertion that "only Americans can ever hurt America." No power – not even China or Russia – can defeat the US economically, technologically, or militarily. But, by re-electing Trump, Americans could severely undermine their own interests and propel the world toward an ever-bleaker future.

*Andrew Sheng, Distinguished Fellow of the Asia Global Institute at the University of Hong Kong and a member of the UNEP Advisory Council on Sustainable Finance, is a former chairman of the Hong Kong Securities and Futures Commission. His latest book is From Asian to Global Financial Crisis.*

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*The interview is provided by www.project-syndicate.org in cooperation with The Baltic Times*

TRUMP'S TEMPERAMENTAL, TRANSACTIONAL APPROACH TO FOREIGN AFFAIRS – WHICH HAS INCLUDED PRAISING DICTATORS, WITHDRAWING FROM MULTILATERAL AGREEMENTS, AND TWEETING WILD THREATS WHENEVER HE HAS FELT CORNERED – HAS CAUSED CONSIDERABLE CONFUSION AMONG AMERICA'S ALLIES AND RIVALS ALIKE (NOT TO MENTION US OFFICIALS AND BUREAUCRATS). NOT SURPRISINGLY, IT HAS SEVERELY UNDERMINED AMERICA'S STANDING ON THE WORLD STAGE.

# Kidnappings and assaults in Belarus. Inside Lukashenko's crackdown on independent voices

Dzmitry MITSKEVICH

Never a free media-friendly country, Belarus is intensifying crackdowns on reporters in the run-up to presidential election. Belsat TV journalist Dzmitry Mitskevich experienced it firsthand.

June 10, 2020, 18:43. Two men approach a car parked in a narrow street near Hrodna city centre. Behind them, eight young men follow.

The men surround the car shouting "Police!", as they take the hands of both men and pack them into a grey unmarked van that has just pulled over.

In a couple of seconds, the bus is driving fast along the streets of the place that has been once a favourite city of Stefan Batory, the famed 16-century Polish-Lithuanian king.

This looks like a kidnapping scene from a movie about Mexican drug cartels. But it isn't.

One of the two people shoved into the grey Russian Gazel bus is myself, Dzmitry Mitskevich, a journalist of Belsat TV which is banned by the Lukashenko regime. The other man is my cameraman.

Minutes before the detention on June 10, we had finished filming from the centre of Hrodna where state organisations had been collecting signatures for Alexander Lukashenko. He is running for his sixth presidential term in the upcoming election on August 9.

Fortunately, we didn't turn off the equipment and our colleagues in Minsk and Warsaw were able to witness our arrest live on their screens.

We were detained by the special police forces – OMON, as they call themselves according to Soviet tradition. The police in Belarus is still called 'militia', like in the USSR.

The Soviet militia was initially a non-professional organisation for law enforcement. The term 'militia' sounds appropriate for Belarusian strongmen in civilian clothes who are attacking people in the streets.

Minutes later on June 10, the van arrives to Hrodna Leninski district police station where we hear that we're charged with breaking Article 22.9 of the Belarusian Administrative Code.

BNS/TBT staff

Pope Francis has appointed Algirdas Jurevicius as the bishop of the Roman Catholic diocese of Telsiai, the Lithuanian Bishops' Conference said on June 2. The 48-year-old replaces Kęstutis Kevėlas, who was appointed archbishop of Kaunas in February.

Jurevicius studied at the seminary of Kaunas and the Catholic Faculty of Theology of the Vytautas Magnus University of Kaunas, and was awarded a doctorate in pastoral theology at the Philosophisch-Theologische Hochschule Sankt Georgen in Frankfurt-am-Main, Germany.



The article prohibits producing content for media not registered and accredited in Belarus. As the Belarusian Foreign Ministry has refused to issue a single accreditation to Belsat reporters, we are always facing the risk of breaking the law.

At the police station, we are forced to hand over all of our possessions, including phones, watches and jewellery. Everything is listed on the 'detention protocol'.

The police officers treated us quite politely and even propose to take my temperature in order to if I don't have Covid-19. But this is not their usual behaviour. I have heard reports from my colleagues who were subjected to beatings and intimidation at police stations.

On June 20, for instance, the police in Hantsavichy, Brest region, brutally detained journalists of the Hancavicki čas newspaper, beating and accusing them of "insubordination to the police officer".

Three hours later, when we are finally released, our things are handed back to us, except the video equipment and phones – these things will be taken "for expertise" in order to find out whether we used them to break the law. This is a new practice by the authorities – they did not use to confiscate equipment before.

The detention protocol is written by the OMON men and local



police officers. Often, one of the main tasks of people in such positions is fighting independent media and political opposition.

On June 18, we were given a fine of around 850 US dollars. According to the court, all the equipment except our private mobile phones had to be confiscated, because they were "tools for committing offence".

This is, however, against the law, since the Administrative Code doesn't provide for the confiscation of equipment as punishment. Meanwhile, Article 22.9 itself is a direct violation of the constitutional right to free speech.

Protocols in such cases are usually fabricated by the police who receive orders from higher author-

crossing the Belarusian-Polish border on November 21, 2019.

He was one of the authors of the film *Lukashenko*. Criminal Materials, which details the Belarusian ruler's rise to power and his grip on it since 1994.

The film became extremely popular, getting more than 2.5 million views only on YouTube. According to information from different sources, Lukashenko, who is extremely sensitive to criticism, took it as a personal insult.

Another instance of heavy pressure on the media happened in 2018. On August 7, the police broke into the offices of the country's most popular online news outlets Tut.by and Belapan.by.

After searching the offices, the police officers seized equipment and detained journalists of both outlets, which are considered independent but not radically opposed to Lukashenko's regime.

The journalists of Tut.by and Belapan.by were accused of illegally accessing information of the BelTA state-run news agency, resulting in big fines and arrests.

Finally on March 26, 2020, the editor-in-chief of Ej.by, Sjarhei Satsuk, was arrested for allegedly accepting a bribe to publish an investigative article.

Satsuk is famous for his investigations which tackle corruption among Belarusian officials. He was released on April 4, 2020, after the criminal case against him was re-qualified as "fraud". The case is still ongoing.

At the moment, the Belarusian authorities are in their traditional pre-election hysteria, doing everything they can to prevent people from organising and participating in mass protests.

As a result, repressions against independent media will continue and become even tougher. Arrests of journalists will likely follow.

Dzmitry Mitskevich is a journalist at Belsat TV, analyst of Belarus Security Blog, editor-in-chief of Varta – a Belarusian annual magazine on national security. His fields of interests include information warfare, propaganda, international politics and fighting terrorism.

## Lithuania opens its 5th honorary consulate in Spain

BNS/TBT staff

Lithuania opened on June 2 its fifth honorary consulate in Spain, the Foreign Ministry said. The honorary consulate in Santander, the capital of the region of Cantabria on the north coast of Spain, will be headed by Spanish national, businesswoman Ana Belen Gutierrez Lavin.

Lithuania also has honorary consulates in Tenerife, Galicia, the Basque Country, and Castilla-La Mancha and Murcia.



# IN & OUT

## Movie Guide

### Capone (2020) – in cinemas from Friday, July 3

Fantastic Four director Josh Trank has created a strange, bitter-flavoured account of the celebrated mafioso in terminal decline in Florida. Trank's "Capone," a star vehicle in which Tom Hardy plays the gangster of the title, will talk about Al Capone after a long prison sentence. Linda Cardellini, Jack Lowden, Noel Fisher, Kyle MacLachlan, and Matt Dillon also star in supporting roles.

Once a ruthless businessman and bootlegger who ruled Chicago with an iron fist, Alphonse Capone was the most infamous and feared gangster of American lore. It's 1946, and Capone's days as the legendary underworld kingpin of Chicago are long gone; so are the eleven years he spent in prison for tax evasion. He's now 47, a retired gangster, comfortable but ailing, teetering towards death as he drifts through the days at his creamy mansion in Palm Island, Florida, surrounded by federal agents who are watching his every move.

Harrowing memories of his violent and brutal origins melt into his waking life. Capone is suffering the effects of paresis, a form of dementia brought on by late-stage syphilis. He's incontinent, and his memory is going; so is his ability to distinguish reality from fantasy (at times the film slips into a sequence that turns



out to be from his imagination). Lurching around in a red paisley silk bathrobe, Capone still exudes a coiled-snake aura of violence, but much of the time Hardy squints off into space with that stunted, vaguely forlorn zombie stare.

Hardy's performance is starkly unselfish, yet part of its fetishized authenticity is that Capone never has anything too interesting to say. The concept feels original, even if it does suggest the last half hour of "The Irishman" crossed with the doddering-legend parts of "Citizen Kane," all mixed in with Hardy's apparent desire to play the creature in "Frankenstein."

Learn more about the movie at [www.imdb.com](http://www.imdb.com)

## Wining & Dining Guide

### Fii Restaurant, Tartu

In Tartu you can be sure that Restaurant Fii is the place to take time for yourself and your loved ones. It is a meeting place for intelligent and good people. The friendly staff warmly welcomes visitors all year round and takes great care of them offering fabulous service.

The restaurant's menu combines the best flavours of the Scandinavian cuisine and the top picks from other national cuisines. They use pure raw materials in order to offer you the joy of discovering familiar tastes and finding pleasant surprises. Dishes are el-

egantly plated, while at the same time staying true to the raw ingredients.

Taste mouthwatering lamb, fish and prawns. Based on the reviewers' opinions, waiters offer delicious wine.

The cosy atmosphere of this spot makes guests feel relaxed and have a nice time. This is a true favourite among locals and a good choice for a romantic night out.

The restaurant is located on the 2nd floor of Sophia hotel. The address is 75 Ringtee, Tartu, 50407. To book a table, call +372 5885 5200, +372 638 0853, email [info@fiiresto.ee](mailto:info@fiiresto.ee) or use the restaurant's web form.



## Event Guide

### ESTONIA

#### July 01-04, Baltoscandal 2020, various venues in Rakvere



Baltoscandal is an international festival of performing arts that will be held for the 16th time in 2020. The oldest festival in the Baltics is forward-looking and holds the pulse of society. From the outset, the idea of the festival has been to show the different forms, causes and possibilities of theatre production. Artistic director of the festival Priit Raud: "The performance artists of Baltoscandal take an interest in the environment. There are only questions, and it doesn't matter how uncomfortable these sometimes are. Comfort is not interesting." All official information on the festival can be found at [www.baltoscandal.ee](http://www.baltoscandal.ee)

#### July 02-12, Music of Seven Cities, various venues in Ida-Viru County

The original idea of the festival – seven days, seven concerts, seven cities – has grown over time and today



Music of Seven Cities has become a major event in the exciting concert venues of Ida-Virumaa. This is a long-awaited great summer music festival that this year will stroll comfortably through various genres, from swing to rock 'n' roll and from early music to blues, and will involve the entire county. The festival will host a total of 15 concerts, among which the listeners of different ages will find musical encounters to fit their liking. This is the biggest summer meeting place in Ida-Virumaa! Find out more about the festival at [www.concert.ee](http://www.concert.ee)

#### Open till July 12, 20th Spring Exhibition of the Estonian Artists Association, Art Hall Gallery, Tallinn

In 2020, the Spring Exhibition of the Estonian Artists Association will celebrate its 20th anniversary. The Spring Exhibition offers the joy of recognition. As part of the Spring Exhibition, a portrait exhibition curated by Kai Kaljo and featuring 66 artists



has already been opened at the Art Hall Gallery. Above all, the display focuses on works by the middle and older generation of artists, but the list of participants also includes younger artists. The genre of psychological portrait is very honest in many respects; it does not allow the artist or model to hide anything or go down an easier path. Portrait as a genre can hopefully provide support in the post-truth era. Works displayed at the exhibition will be compiled into a catalogue, and the Audience Prize will also be awarded. For more information on the exhibition please visit [www.kunstihooone.ee](http://www.kunstihooone.ee)

### LATVIA

#### July 02-04, Rigas Ritmi 2020, various venues in Riga

The international music festival for improvisation, jazz and world music Rigas Ritmi 2020 (Riga Rhythms 2020) celebrates its twentieth anniversary in July this year. Rigas Ritmi Festival 2020 offers a grand program - a se-



lection of music gourmets. This year's festival will feature Cuban pianist Roberto Fonseca and vocalist Danay Suarez, American singer Sheryl Johns as well as Grammy nominees and world music super group Bokante. The world-famous music producer Quincy Jones will present a special gift on the anniversary of the festival, offering listeners to enjoy the extraordinary vocals of young American singer Clark Beckham. Festival visitors will also be delighted by charismatic Swedish jazz singer Liselotte Östblom, Tom Syson, as well as young Latvian artists Gints Smukais, Rihards Libietis Orchestra, Very Cool People, and many others. All official information on the festival can be found at [www.rigas-ritmi.lv](http://www.rigas-ritmi.lv)

#### July 09-12, International Street Theatre Festival SPOT, various venues in Vilnius

Contemporary street theater festival SPOT returns to Vilnius on July 9-12. Throughout the four days of the festival, city residents and guests will have the opportunity to attend six different events which include site-specific performances, soundwalks and installation art. Admission is free to all



the Avant-Garde', shows the paradoxical existence of two completely independent phenomena: on the one hand, ballet as an art creates worlds of fairy tales, myths and legends, which give mankind definitions of good and bad, black and white or love and hate, and on the other hand the phenomenon when ballet dancers dedicate their whole lives to creating these worlds through physical, spiritual and emotionally demanding work. The entrance to this exhibition is free. Learn more at [www.liveriga.com](http://www.liveriga.com)



festival events. Important: due to COVID-19 restrictions, registration is required to maintain audience limits. Learn more at [www.menuspaustuve.lt](http://www.menuspaustuve.lt)

#### July 18, Street Music Day, various venues in Vilnius

Save the date! Music will flow through the streets of Vilnius Old Town on July 18th. On this day, the city will be filled with the sounds of music and viewers can enjoy the performances created by musicians. Whether you are a professional musician or an amateur; play metal or country - everyone can participate! Check out the talents of professional musicians, amateurs and those dreaming about the big stage. No matter what kind of music you like, you will certainly hear some samples of it. And don't forget to grab your drum - Drum2gether's percussion and improvisation parade is open for everyone to join. The entrance is free. Find out more at [www.gmd.lt](http://www.gmd.lt)



#### Open from July 22, Christopher Summer Festival, various venues in Vilnius

Everyone is welcome to the 26th Christopher Festival. What to expect? Well,

the festival's motto is all genres are good except the boring ones. You'll have a chance to hear more than the masterpieces of classical music, including jazz, experimental projects, and traditional works that are sure to find their way into the hearts of the audience. Let the music take you to the church vaults, under the summer sky, or into Lithuania's lovely nature. Full festival information is available at [www.kristupofestivalis.lt](http://www.kristupofestivalis.lt)

## Genocide center launches website on repressed people

### BNS/TBT staff

The Genocide and Resistance Research Center of Lithuania (GRRCL) has on June 1 launched a publicly accessible website about people repressed by the Soviets in 1940-1953.

Information can be accessed on <http://www.lietuvisiasibire.lt/lt/represuotieji> and includes information

about Lithuanian residents who were repressed – deported, jailed or killed – by the Soviet government during the period.

Over 150,000 testimonies, including questionnaires, documents, letters as well as short and long stories, about Lithuanian residents' repressions have been collected.

## Police officers paid respects to killed colleague



### BNS/TBT staff

Lithuanian police officers paid on June 1 their respects to a police officer who was killed during his service in Mažeikiai District last week by turning on their cars; lights

and sirens for one minute. The funeral of killed police investigator Saulius Žymantas took place on Monday in Vieksniai, Mažeikiai District. The ceremony was also attended by Interior Minister Rita Tamašiūnienė

## ECB: Seimas cannot cut central banker's pay

### BNS/TBT staff

The European Central Bank said on June 4 that remuneration for board members of the Bank of Lithuania cannot be changed during their terms by Lithuania's legislature, Seimas. Moreover, any planned changes should

be pre-coordinated with the ECB. The idea to give Vasiliauskas a pay cut has been proposed by Liberal MP Kęstutis Glaveckas. Based on the Bank of Lithuania's information, Vasiliauskas' pre-tax salary amounted to 11,863 euros, or 7,161 euros after tax.

## Lithuanian author wins prestigious Andersen children's book award

### Margarita ALPER

Autor and illustrator Monika Vaicenavičienė has been awarded the Premio Andersen 2020 prize in Italy for her book, "What is a River?"

The book, awarded in the non-fiction children's literature category, was first released in Swedish and has now been translated into more than 10 languages including Lithuanian. The book will be published in English and Somali languages in the autumn.

According to the author, the story is based around several categories – the river as a journey, as a home, and as a mystery or a riddle.

Vaicenavičienė defines her book as an oral documentary, and to make it



connect more with the audience, she established two key characters blending folklore, mythology, as well as ecol-

ogy and everyday problems. The Andersen award has been running since 1982. The winners had to be an-

nounced during the Bologna children's book fair in March, which was cancelled due to the pandemic.

## Poll: Estonian residents believe crisis to be over, yet deem necessary to remain vigilant

### BNS /TBT Staff

Three quarters of Estonian residents believe that acute crisis in the country is over, however 68 percent deem it necessary to remain vigilant, a survey by pollster Turu-uuringute AS shows.

The number of people with a positive and enthusiastic view of the future has increased further after the end of the emergency situation, Turu-uuringute AS said on Monday, June 29.

Compared with the week following the end of the emergency situation, residents' sense of threat regarding the coronavirus has declined. The share of people who believe that the acute crisis is over has grown from 63 percent to 75 percent. While 7 percent opined that life can now return to normalcy, 68 percent deemed it important to remain vigilant and continue following safety measures.

The share of people who thought the situation remains critical and deemed it likely that another outbreak will occur has significantly declined from 28 percent to 15 percent. 8 percent said that the situation was never critical and that the reaction

to the virus has been disproportionate. The share of people who held this opinion has not changed compared with the previous survey in mid-May.

A number of restrictions with a view to curbing the spread of the coronavirus were introduced during the emergency situation, the lion's share of which have now been relaxed.

Forty-seven percent of the recipients in the survey said they were well informed about the valid measures and 43 percent believed they were sufficiently aware of the emergency situation, residents' awareness has somewhat declined as 57 percent said they were well informed at the time.

Among the measures remaining in effect, the requirement to continue isolation of those infected and their close contacts garnered the largest support at 95 percent, while 88 percent also deemed it reasonable that people arriving from states where the infection rate is high should self-quarantine. Restrictions on entertainment facilities were support-

ed by 74 percent and those on indoor and outdoor events by 65 percent.

Residents' attitudes have become more positive compared with the previous poll in mid-May -- the share of people who said that they are hopeful and enthusiastic about the future increased from 84 to 89 percent. The share of those willing to take risks, if needed, rose from 54 percent to 60 percent.

A higher than average risk-taking appetite was expressed by men, respondents aged 15-24, ethnic Estonians and those earning a higher than average income.

Residents' diligence in adherence to restrictions has gradually declined since the sixth week of the emergency situation, still remaining relatively high, however -- half of the respondents comply with all the official instructions on curbing the spread of the virus while 32 percent follow most and 10 percent some of the restrictions.

Eight percent of the respondents said that they are not following any restrictions and are living their normal lives. Adherence to restrictions is lower among men and respondents aged

below 35. As to specific practices geared at infection control, diligent hand hygiene remains the most popular.

Eighty-six percent of the respondents said that they are aware that they can prevent other people from contracting the virus with their behavior and 72 percent said that they were concerned over other people infecting them without knowing it themselves. Respondents' sense of threat has dropped compared with survey results from mid-May.

Altogether 53 percent of the respondents said that the coronavirus situation has reduced their or their family's income. The figure has decreased compared with mid-April, when it stood at 55 percent. A reduction in income was reported by 66 percent of non-ethnic Estonians, above all among customer service staff, skilled workers and plant and machine operators.

The survey was conducted by means of online and telephone interviews among 1,256 Estonian residents aged 15 and over. This was the 11th time for the regular survey commission.

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# Odessa and Tallinn share a beautiful partnership

In June 2015, the-then Vice Mayor of Tallinn Kalle Klandorf visited Odessa, Tallinn's partner city, and handed a simulator for training of arm and leg muscles to the Ukrainian city's hospital N.8. Tallinn gave it to Odessa as its gift. The medical device allows a better rehabilitation of patients with paralysis of upper and lower limbs.

## A tourist destination

Odessa, a city celebrated in cinema and literature, is the top tourist destination of the Black Sea and the maritime capital of Ukraine. Thanks to its port system, Odessa is an international logistic hub.

With a population of almost exactly one million, Odessa is famous for its cultural heritage, the sophisticated gastronomy and the sparkly nightlife, which created the myth of the "Pearl of the Black Sea". Above all, its worldwide fame is due to the cinema masterpiece "Battleship Potëmkin" (Ejzenstejn, 1925), with the unforgettable scene of the massacre on the stairway, which is still Odessa's main landmark. Indeed, it was the Hollywood of Soviet Union.

## A little of history and culture

The most intriguing characteristic of Odessa is the cosmopolitan soul, known since its foundation in 1794, and the numerous nationalities contributing to the building of the city: Italian, French, German, Greek, Turkish, British, Polish, Bulgarian, Romanian and Jewish.

Odessa owes its birth to a Neapolitan officer serving under Catherine the Great, who seized the local Turkish fort and scouted the harbour during the war with the Ottoman Empire. He founded a new city, choosing the name of Odessa, from the legend of Odysseus. Thanks to José De Ribas, the first leading class of the city was mainly composed by merchants and ship-owners coming from Naples, Palermo and Genoa.

## Developed by two French mayors

Thereafter, the city was developed by two French mayors: Duc de Richelieu (grandson of the famous Bishop of the "Three Musketeers") and Count Langeron. They set the urban rational design of the City, with the artistic guidance of some prestigious Italian architects. The result was a "St.Petersburg of the South", but with a French-Italian light touch.

The Empress Catherine invited foreigners to settle in the new conquered province, especially from German States, and allocated many funds to build not only the main port of the Russian Empire, but also an ideal city, full of art and culture. Therefore, Odessa became an industrious and tolerant melting pot of various cultures. The great Russian poet Pushkin, who spent there one year, described a city where: "people read newspa-



ODESSA OWES ITS BIRTH TO A NEAPOLITAN OFFICER SERVING UNDER CATHERINE THE GREAT, WHO SEIZED THE LOCAL TURKISH FORT AND SCOUTED THE HARBOUR DURING THE WAR WITH THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE. HE FOUNDED A NEW CITY, CHOOSING THE NAME OF ODESSA, FROM THE LEGEND OF ODYSSEUS.



pers in Italian, French, German, and Greek, and enjoy a political and economic freedom superior to other Russian cities".

## A mix of many cultures

After the initial immigration of Italians, the city's business spine was integrated by Germans, Greeks and Jewish (one third of the population, before the Revolution). Odessa was the easiest place of the Russian Empire to become rich, due to the status of "Porto Franco" (tax exemption on trade). For this reason, it got the nickname of "Russian California". The famous American writer Mark Twain visited Odessa in 1867 and wrote: "I stood in Odessa for the first time. It looked just like an American city".

## Five reasons to visit Odessa

**Beautiful architecture and iron monuments:** Potemkin Stairway, Opera Theatre and Passage (monumental arcade) are the city's most famous jewels. There are also amazing courtyards, museums and funny monuments ("Orange the Tsar", "Policeman with birds", the 12<sup>th</sup> Chair, the Sailor's wife, etc.), which create the atmosphere of a movie setting.

**Gastronomy:** Odessa is the capital of Ukrainian-fusion cuisine. In



its dishes is present the influence of Bessarabian, Jewish, French, Georgian, Genoese, Turkish and Mongolian cuisine. Odessa's restaurants offer a high quality of food, with a sophisticated taste for interior design.

**Beaches and nightlife:** Odessa beach clubs are famous as well as the city's nightlife. The low cost compared with quality of entertainment is very competitive for exciting summer holidays.

**A house in Odessa:** expatriates

in Odessa have the feeling to live in a city with mixed ingredients: European style, maritime atmosphere, ironic and charming people. The City broadcasts love vibes, due to literature references and local beauties.

Many foreigners buy apartments in Odessa for personal use or investment (they are cheaper than in other European cities).

**Business:** Odessa is the sea gateway of Ukrainian agriculture ex-

port to Middle and Far East, North Africa and Europe markets, and a logistic hub connecting trade from the Black Sea to the Baltic Sea and Central Europe, through railway routes. An ideal place for foreign investors, looking for opportunities in Port infrastructure, logistics services and agriculture machineries.

*This article has been provided by "The Odessa Journal", the online magazine in English dedicated to Odessa's news on culture, lifestyle and business.*