

BRIDGES

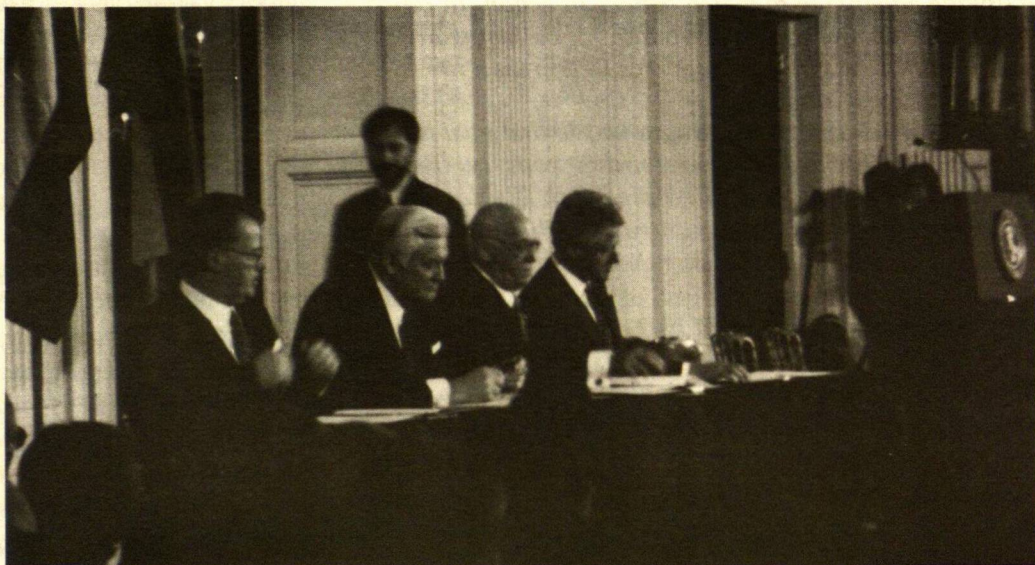
LITHUANIAN AMERICAN NEWS JOURNAL

Volume 22, No. 1

JANUARY/FEBRUARY 1998

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The presidents of the United States, Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia signed a Charter of Partnership on January 16th in Washington, D.C.

PERSPECTIVES

A history teacher was explaining to her seventh grade students about the American Declaration of Independence signed in 1776. She went further to explain that this signing didn't guarantee that all battles would cease, all problems would be solved, or that all people will live in perfect contentment. The class project was to research and explain the aftermath of the American Revolution.

Interestingly, the students found that Americans experienced territorial turmoil, an uneasy economy, and the tendency to want to cling to England's style of governing. To top it off, students were surprised that it took 13 years for the American government to finally get itself together.

We've all come to believe that once "independence" is declared, life becomes logical, brighter, and more organized. Yet, after two presidencies, that of Vytautas Landsbergis and Algirdas Brazauskas, the instant makeover hasn't taken effect. Strangely, it has followed the path America laid out so many years ago.

But, that's the way it should be, if history has any say in this. Work towards refining Lithuania's democracy is still in full swing, and should take time and careful planning. During this fine-tuning period, we have the unique advantage to watch history in action, in repetition, in Lithuania. In fact, wouldn't it be just wonderful if Lithuania got itself together in less than the 13 years it took for America?

One solid advantage working towards that goal is the Lithuanian people's outlook for their country. By electing an American encultured president, Valdas Adamkus, they infuse their country with the drive, ambition, and global savvy that any democratic country would need to flourish.

By the way, for the second part of the history assignment, these observant seventh graders were asked to compare the aftermath of the American Revolution to any present-day country of their choice. Guess which country was the most popular selection for study.

Rasa Ardys-Juska

Editor

BRIDGES

Lithuanian-American News Journal

(USPS 0735-830) Published 10 times per year by The Lithuanian-American Community, Inc, 2060 N. 14th Street, Suite 217, Arlington, VA 22201. BRIDGES is the official publication of the Lithuanian-American Community, Inc.

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BRIDGES Editorial Office, c/o Rasa Ardys-Juska, 1212 Mohegan Road, Manasquan, NJ 08736-1650.

Unsolicited manuscripts must be accompanied by a stamped, self-addressed envelope if return is desired.

For subscription and advertising information, please contact:

LAC, Inc./BRIDGES, c/o Ramas Pliura, 1927 West Boulevard, Racine, WI 53403.

Subscription rate is \$18.00 annually (US Mail serviced subscribers; subscriptions to other addresses are \$32.00), payable in advance (US funds). Periodicals Postage paid at Arlington, VA 22201; and additional locations.

Postmaster: Send any address corrections and/or changes to LAC, Inc./BRIDGES, 1927 West Boulevard, Racine, WI 53403

Regina Narusis

A Charter of Partnership

"The Partners view their partnership in the areas of political, economic, security, defense, cultural, and environmental affairs as contributing to closer ties between their people and facilitating the full integration of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania into European and transatlantic structures."

...from The Charter of Partnership, Jan. 16, 1998

The presidents of the United States, Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia signed a Charter of Partnership on January 16th in Washington, D.C. It spells out our common goals and values; to wit a peaceful and integrated Europe dedicated to democracy, the rule of law, free markets and fundamental freedoms.

A Meaningful Beginning

The Charter is an executive agreement, not a treaty, that provides a mechanism to deepen and broaden the relations between our countries. The United States of America acknowledges a real, profound, and enduring interest in the independence, sovereignty, and territorial integrity and security of Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia.

To effectuate the goals set out in the agreement, the Charter provides for a Partnership Commission that will meet at least once a year. This Commission will be headed by Deputy Secretary of State, Strobe Talbott. It is further expected that there will be established two bilateral-lateral working groups. One such group will be on defense/military, headed by U.S. Defense Undersecretary Slocombe, and the other on economic

issues, headed by U.S. State Undersecretary Stuart Eizenstat.

This document is a meaningful agreement but, it is only a beginning. It must be funded by sufficient resources and provide for the actual implementation of the goals and objectives.

NATO Considerations

Missing from the Charter are a number of Lithuania's concerns. It does not address Lithuania's security concerns from Belarus and Kaliningrad. The threat from Belarus is posed by the growing dictatorship in that country. In addition, Russian demands a permanent transit corridor through Lithuania for their military operations in Kaliningrad. Lithuania and Poland separate Kaliningrad from Russia.

Though the Charter commits the United States to help Lithuania prepare for NATO membership, it does not commit the U.S. to *support its candidacy* for NATO membership.

The Charter does recite that the three Baltic nations reaffirm their goal to become full members of NATO, and the the U.S. welcomes their aspirations. The U.S., also, supports the *efforts* of Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia to join NATO and acknowledges

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that all the three Baltic countries are *aspiring* members of NATO.

In his remarks at the Charter-signing ceremony, President Clinton made it clear that America's security is tied to Europe and that Europe will never be fully secure if Baltic security is in doubt.

He further went on to say, "NATO's door is and will remain open to every partner nation, and America is determined to create the conditions under which Estonia, Lithuania, and Latvia can one day walk through that door."

What Lithuania Deserves

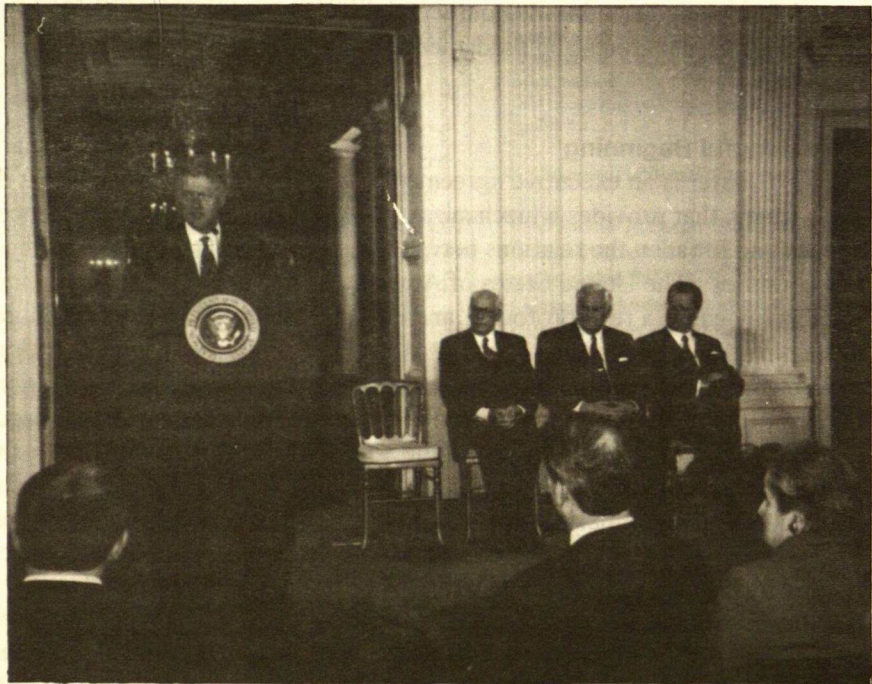
In July, 1997, Secretary of State Madeleine Albright said publicly that Lithuania is a "serious candidate" for NATO membership.

We, Lithuanian-Americans, certainly know that NATO is the most successful war deterrent in history. NATO is the most effective means we have for joint military action with countries that share our interests and values. We were disappointed when Lithuania was not invited to join last year, but we firmly believe Lithuania should be invited to join NATO in 1999.

We sincerely hope Congress will appropriate sufficient funds to ef-

fectuate the Charter; that it will earmark sufficient funds in the foreign operations bill for 1999 to help prepare Lithuania for NATO membership; and extend U.S. technical assistance past fiscal year 1999 to at least fiscal year 2001. More assistance is necessary in the areas of health care reform and anti-organized crime efforts.

The Lithuanian-American Community welcomes the Charter, but we expect more. As Americans of Lithuanian heritage, we celebrate the deepening bonds of friendship and mutual support between the two democracies which have enriched our lives.



Introductory remarks are given by President Clinton before the Charter of Partnership was signed by the presidents of Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia.

Photo: Asta Banionis

Paul Goble

A Defining Election

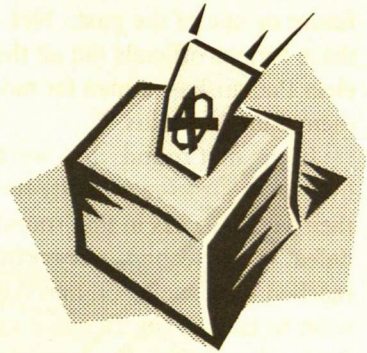
The victory of Valdas Adamkus over Arturas Paulauskas in the Lithuanian presidential election is likely to help define not only the future of that country but of other former communist states as well.

That conclusion has relatively little to do with their biographic differences which have drawn so much media comment; the difference between a Lithuanian who spent much of his life as an American official and one who was the scion of the Soviet-era nomenklatura.

Instead, it reflects three other, possibly less obvious, factors that seem certain to become more important not only in Lithuania but in other countries across this region.

First, this election—in both rounds—was in many ways the first genuinely post-independence vote in Lithuania. This time the electorate voted not out of a concern over whether Lithuania would continue to exist but rather over what kind of country it would be. Both commentary in the Lithuania media and the pattern of voting testifies to this.

Vytautas Landsbergis, the man who led Lithuania to the recovery of independence, finished third in the first round and thus was shut out from the final. Part of the reason for his poor showing was that he continued to cast the issue in terms of Lithuania's survival rather than Lithuania's future develop-



ment. Unfortunately for him, at least this time around, ever more Lithuanians appear to have decided that they now have the unaccustomed luxury to think about what Lithuania will be rather than whether it will survive.

Second, the voting demonstrated that in Lithuania, at least, the old communist party and state nomenklatura has the power to mobilize a significant portion of the population in elections, but an even greater power to mobilize people to vote against it. In the first round, Paulauskas led with 45 percent of the vote, far ahead of Adamkus and Landsbergis. But in the second round, Paulauskas was unable to pick up the five additional percentage points that he needed to win.

Throughout the campaign, Paulauskas cast himself as a youthful man of the future. Yet public opinion polls and the actual voting suggest that most Lithuanians were more impressed by the people he had around him, people associated with Lithuania's Soviet-era past. Part of the reason for this was a poster put up during the closing days of the campaign. It showed Paulauskas with some of these officials standing behind him, directly asking whether he was a man of the

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future or one of the past. Not surprisingly, these former officials did all they could to elect Paulauskas, a man far more familiar to them than Adamkus.

In the first round, they were able to deliver an impressive plurality for him. But their very success in that round led to their defeat in the second, as ever more people reached the conclusion that they did not want to take the chance that voting for Paulauskas might entail.

In addition, the Paulauskas campaign only added to this feeling when his campaign manager used the same word to describe Lithuanian-Americans, like Adamkus, that Lithuanians have used in the past to describe the Soviet occupiers. That too backfired, probably less because it offended the way in which Lithuanians think about the West than because it recalled an ideological style that they have done so much to escape.

And third, this election gives Lithuania five more years to escape from its commu-

nist past, and to develop under the leadership of someone steeped in democracy and free markets, and committed to broadening and deepening its ties to the West.

Unless something untoward happens, the next presidential vote in Lithuania will not take place until 2003. By that time, Lithuania will have had 12 years of post communist independence, a period of time that should allow that country to turn the corner.

This is not to say that everything is now settled and over in Lithuania. Many problems remain. Some are hangovers from the past. Others may be self-inflicted, even by the new president-elect. Indeed, his relative lack of experience in Lithuania may make it difficult for him to cope with everything going on there, and thus make it easier for some to avoid changing the ways in which they do business.

But this vote in Lithuania was a defining election, one that seems certain to lead that country in a new direction. And even more, it may even become a bellweather for similar elections across the former communist world.

Notes on the 1998 Lithuanian Presidential Elections

- Final results were; Valdas Adamkus - 50.37% of the vote, Arturas Paulauskas - 49.63% of the vote.
- The eastern regions of Lithuania supported Adamkus, while the majority of the middle and western regions supported Paulauskas.
- Paulauskas received the majority of votes in the electoral districts but, votes cast by post helped Adamkus achieve the edge he needed.
- Pres. Adamkus will be earning almost twice as much from his American retirement plan, than as president of Lithuania; 20,000 litai (\$5,000 US) vs. 11,000 litai per month.

Dalia Grybauskaite, Ph.D

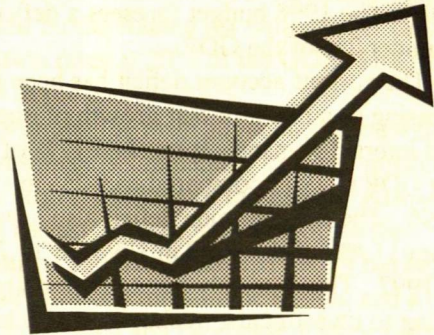
LITHUANIA'S ECONOMY: *Focus 1997*

Focused economic reforms, attractive foreign trade policies, and investment opportunities lead Lithuania into the world's economic sphere.

In Lithuania, the last decade of the century is marked by fundamental market oriented economic reforms. Since the end of 1996, after a new, stable, right-centered government came into power, the course of re-integration into the world's economy, based on market principles, accelerated cash privatization, structural and legislative reforms.

Lithuania's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth began recovering in 1994, increasing to 4.2% in 1996. From January to September 1997, the GDP rose to 6.4%. The GDP per capita at nominal value in 1996 amounted to \$2,120 US. Taking into account the Purchasing Power Parity (PPP), this amount doubles.

Nearly 70% of the local GDP originate in the private sector. Increased output in nearly all sectors of the economy has contributed significantly to the sustainable



growth of the national economy during the last four years. Textiles, leather, chemical, and wood processing industries were the first industrial sectors to recover after the decline. Currently, recovery is evident in other traditionally important economic sectors, such as machinery, electronics, and agriculture.

Significant GDP growth in 1997 was accompanied by approximately 13% increase in real income -- +6% in 1996. Together with export growth of 15% (+24% in 1996), these were major factors of Lithuania's surging economy.

The official unemployment rate in 1997 was estimated at 5.8%; down compared to 7.1% in 1996. The average wage in Lithuania reached \$220.00 US per month in 1997. As evidence of a growing economy and firm monetary policy, the rate of inflation in Lithuania, decreased from 410% in 1993 to 13.1% in 1996, and continued to decline to 8.4% in 1997. This was one of the lowest in Central and Eastern Europe. The average annual inflation rate is expected to be under 7% by 1999.

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Despite the difficulties related to revenue generation, the general government deficit was gradually reduced from 5.5% of the GDP in 1994 to an estimated 1.3% in 1997. The 1998 budget foresees a deficit of under 2% of the GDP.

The current account deficit has been increasing as a result of fast growth of import and internal demand. It reached 12% of the GDP in 1997 compared to 9.2% in 1996. The foreign trade deficit also grew from 11.4% of the GDP in 1996, to 14.7% in 1997. This is mainly due to imports relating to investments; technology, machinery, and equipment.

The level of Lithuania's developmental results and financial credibility was evaluated by international rating institutions. In June 1997, *Standard & Poors*, for the first time accommodated Lithuania with a BBB+ investment rating.

In 1991, Lithuania's trade with the countries of the European Union (EU) amounted to 2% of the total foreign trade. Currently its share is 38.6% and is expected to grow in the future. Lithuania's export growth rate is among the highest in Central and Eastern Europe. In 1996, it was 24% -- while, the standard imports growth rate is 25%. Germany and the United Kingdom (UK), followed by Italy and Denmark are the most important trade partners in the EU.

Lithuania's trade with the US is growing very quickly.

The US Commerce Department reported that during ten months of 1997, the trade balance between the US and Lithuania was positive for Lithuania.

The United States was importing from Lithuania \$71 million US and exporting to Lithuania \$69 million US. The increase in trade between the two countries in 1996 was about 125%. The same tendency was maintained in 1997. Dominant Lithuanian export products included woven apparel, dairy products, fertilizers, base metals, wood, albumin and glue, glass, and toys.

Lithuania asserts a rather liberal foreign trade policy. There are no quantitative restrictions on imports. Import duties are among the lowest in Central and Eastern Europe. Free trade agreements (FTAs) with 26 countries (EU, the European Free Trade Association (EFTA), Latvia, Estonia, Poland, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Slovenia, and the Ukraine) are in force. An FTA with Turkey is expected to be in effect soon. (See TABLE 1 below for an economic overview)

Bilateral agreements providing for mutual most favored nation (MFN) treatment in trade are enforced with 17 countries: Australia, Belorussia, Bulgaria, Georgia, India, Canada, China, Cyprus, Republic of Korea,

TABLE 1 -- MAIN MACROECONOMIC INDICATORS

END OF PERIOD	1996	1997	COMMENTS
GDP nominal (bn. \$)	7.86	10.0	estimate
GDP growth	4.2	6.4	9 months
GDP per capita (\$ by PPP index)	4,245	4,600	progn.
Unemployment (%)	6.2	6.7	
Real wage increase (%)	6	13	prelim.
Inflation (%)	13.1	8.4	
Export growth (%)	24.0	13.8	9 months
Import growth (%)	25.0	25.0	9 months
Trade balance (\$ m.)	-1,124.0	-1,191.2	9 months
Foreign direct investment, total (\$ m.)	572.0	974.0	9 months
CHANGE IN A YEAR	+220.0	+402.0	9 months
Budget deficit as a % of GDP	-2.5	-1.3	prelim.
Foreign debt as a % of GDP	15.4	14.9	prelim.
DATA: Statistics Department of Lithuania; Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Foreign Affairs			

Cuba, Moldavia, Romania, Russian Federation, Turkey, Uzbekistan, Hungary, and Vietnam. Lithuania expects to become a member of the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 1998.

For more than a year the new government has done much to improve the country's attractiveness for foreign investors. Foreign dollar investments (FDIs) have doubled since 1996 and amounted over \$1 billion US at the end of 1997. This was the first FDI billion in the Baltics. The biggest share of this amount has come from the EU. The United States led with a 27% share of total FDI stock. Several American companies who invested in Lithuania include: Motorola, Philip Morris, Lancaster Steel Co. Inc., Kraft Foods International, Coca-Cola, Masterfoods, and Ochoco Lumber. Other countries investing in Lithuania are Sweden, Germany, and the UK.

By the beginning of 1999, the total FDI stock in Lithuania is expected to rise to a level of \$2 billion US. Cash privatization of large strategic state enterprises, such as "Lithuanian Telecom", "Lithuanian Airlines", "Air Lithuania", "Mazeikiu Nafta", state banks, etc., will play a significant role in the stock increase. Confidence in this growth has already been shown with the *Standard & Poors* investment grade.

The Lithuanian National Stock Exchange could also serve as a good example of fast and steady improvement of the national economy. There are over 520 companies listed on the trading list with market capitalization rates at 20% of the GDP (\$1.8 billion US at the end of 1997).

Among the main advantages for foreign investment is Lithuania's gateway position to the largest markets of the region. Klaipeda is the largest all year, ice-free port in the Baltics. Lithuania has also one of the best road infrastructures in the region, and a highly-skilled and inexpensive labor force.

Currently the private sector creates nearly 70% of the GDP in Lithuania. In 1997 state incomes from privatization amounted to \$20.5 million US, compared to \$0.8 million US in 1996. 1998 is expected to become a "year of great privatization".

Lithuania first focused on small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) for privatization. In the middle of 1997, 5,872 of SMEs were privatized. Their capital accounted for approximately one quarter of the total capital of the 8,065 enterprises that the State owned before privatization. The privatization of SMEs was implemented through vouchers to the employees and managers of the enterprises, and citizens of Lithuania (Stage I). However, in 1995, other methods; cash-based privatization allowing participation of foreign investors (Stage II), were in-

TABLE 2 -- PRIVATIZATION LEVEL (1991 TO JULY 31, 1997)
(fully and partially privatized enterprises)

SECTORS OF ECONOMY	STAGE I OF PRIVATIZATION (AUGUST, 1991 - 1996)		STAGE II OF PRIVATIZATION (AUGUST, 1996 - JULY 31, 1997)		SHARE OF STATE CAPITAL**
	No. of Enterprises	Capital Value (min USD)	No. of Enterprises	Capital Value (min USD)	
Industry	793	496.1	20	3.3	87%
Transport	161	32.1	2	0.004	31%
Construction	600	84.8	14	0.2	98%
Trade	1,721	56.7	45	0.8	77%
Public Utility	345	8.7	5	0.07	29%
Services	991	14.4	5	0.06	98%
Other	1,103	153.0	67	1.0	96%
TOTAL	5,714	845.8	158	5.371	73% (Ave.)

**Share of state capital which has been privatized. DATA: Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Lithuania

troduced. In some cases, the Government retained some shares in private enterprises as a transitional measure. (See Table 2 on the previous page for an overview)

In 1996, the Government drew up plans to privatize 13 (presently, this list contains 14 enterprises) of the largest and strategic enterprises in key industries and services on a cash basis to foreign and domestic investors. In most cases, the State still has 80 to 100% of the shares in these enterprises.

In addition, the Government also launched the privatization of the three largest state banks. After the privatization of 14 state enterprises and three state banks, the main part of state-owned capital will be transferred to the private sector. Currently, there are 157 enterprises not included in the privatization program; for example, the State Nuclear Power Plant, Lithuanian Post, airports, railways and related infrastructures, pipelines, electricity transmission lines, sea ports, etc. (See Table 3 for an overview)

The year of 1997 was also memorable for

U.S. – Lithuania's bilateral relations. Two important economic treaties were initialed, and later signed during President Algirdas Brazauskas's last visit in January of 1998.

These treaties are *The Treaty for the Encouragement and Reciprocal Protection of Investment*, and *The Treaty for the Avoidance of Double Taxation and the Prevention of Fiscal Evasion with Respect to Taxes on Income*.

Presently, Lithuania is a signatory to all the basic economic treaties with the United States. Both treaties are expected to be ratified by the Lithuanian Parliament and the United States Congress, and be effective by 1999.

Economic reforms and a stable government ensure financial opportunities for foreign investors, entrepreneurs, and the Lithuanian people. All of these dramatic, positive changes establish Lithuania's position as a viable partner in the world financial community.

TABLE 3 – FULLY PRIVATIZED ENTERPRISES (1991 TO JULY 31, 1997)
(enterprises included in Table 2, number of enterprises)

SECTOR	STAGE I	STAGE II	TOTAL
Industry		20	78
Transport	10	2	12
Construction	21	14	35
Trade	1,107	45	1,152
Public Utility	264	5	269
Services	787	5	792
Other	539	67	606
TOTAL	2,786	158	2,944

DATA: Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Lithuania

Algirdas Tamosiunas

Sports in Lithuania:

*The Second Lithuanian National Olympics
The Sixth Lithuanian World Sports Games*

The people of Lithuania are preparing for two major summer sporting events, which are expected to attract Lithuanian athletes and spectators from around the world. The best Lithuanian athletes will compete in the Second Lithuanian National Olympics from June 23rd to June 26th and other Lithuanian athletes and sports enthusiasts will participate in the Sixth Lithuanian World Sports Games from June 27th to June 30th.

The First Lithuanian National Olympics occurred in July 1938. This event commemorated the 20th anniversary of the establishment of the independence of the Republic of Lithuania. Athletes of Lithuanian descent from the United States and other countries competed successfully in this historic national event.

For 50 years Soviet-occupied Lithuania was prevented from holding another National Olympic event. It was during this period that Lithuanians in Canada organized the First Lithuanian World Sports Games in Toronto in 1978. It recognized not only the 60th anniversary of the establishment Lithuania's independence but also the 40th anniversary of the Lithuanian National Olympics. Unfortunately, athletes from Lithuania were prevented from participating.

In 1983 and 1988, the Second and Third Lithuanian World Sports Games were hosted

by Lithuanians in the United States (Chicago) and Australia (Adelaide), respectively. A small contingent of athletes from Lithuania did participate in the Sports Games held in Australia. Finally, in 1991 and 1995, the Fourth and Fifth Lithuanian World Sports Games were held in an independent Lithuania. Valdas Adamkus, the new President of Lithuania, was the chairperson of the organizing committee of the 1983 Games, and he led the delegation of Lithuanian athletes who traveled from the United States to participate in the 1991 Games.

In November 1997, the Government of Lithuania approved a recommendation made by a commission comprised of representatives from the Parliament of the Republic of Lithuania and the Lithuanian-American Community, Inc., and by the Lithuanian Olympic Committee and the Government's Department of Physical Education and Sports. The recommendation called for the organization of the Second Lithuanian National Olympics and the Sixth Lithuanian World Sports Games.

These events are currently being organized by a special committee whose membership includes high-profile members of the Lithuanian Government and the Lithuanian Olympic Committee, various national and local Lithuanian governmental officials, and representatives of the major Lithuanian athletic institutions in North America and Australia.

*ALGIRDAS TAMOSIUNAS is Vice President for Sports,
Lithuanian-American Community, Inc.*

The Second Lithuanian National Olympics will be open to high-caliber athletes of Lithuanian descent who have met the eligibility standards set by Lithuania's sports federations. Approximately 1,800 athletes are expected to compete, including a Lithuanian men's basketball team from the United States. The 14 events of these National Olympics will be held at venues located in six of Lithuania's major cities including Kaunas, the Baltic coastal city of Klaipeda and in the nation's capital of Vilnius. Competition will occur in the following sports:

- | | |
|--|-------------------------------------|
| • Soccer (men's) | • Equestrian (open) |
| • Boxing (men's) | • Weightlifting (men's) |
| • Judo (men's & women's) | • Rowing (men's & women's) |
| • Greco-Roman Wrestling (men's) | • Handball (men's & women's) |
| • Cycling (track - men's & women's) | • Basketball (men's & women's) |
| • Sailing (olympics class - men's & women's) | • Swimming (men's & women's) |
| • Kayaking and Canoeing (men's & women's) | • Track and Field (men's & women's) |

The Sixth Lithuanian World Sports Games are open to males and females of Lithuanian background, of all ages and competitive levels. It is believed that about 2,500 athletes will participate in the 18 events to be offered during the Sports Games. The competition will be organized by gender and age groupings, and will be held at venues located in seven of Lithuania's major cities, including Vilnius, Kaunas, and the Baltic resort city of Palanga. The sports to be offered are:

- | | | |
|----------------|--------------------|---------------------------------|
| • Rugby | • Tennis | • Sport Fishing |
| • Chess | • Cycling | • Marksmanship |
| • Sailing | • Bowling | • Volleyball (court & beach) |
| • Billiards | • Swimming | • Basketball (team & 3-on-3) |
| • Badminton | • Orienteering | • Orienteering (with obstacles) |
| • Table Tennis | • Ballroom Dancing | • Alpine Skiing (already held) |

All Lithuanian athletes are encouraged to participate in this summer's sporting events. Participants will need to make their own travel arrangements. The Lithuanian Government will subsidize accommodations during the events. **Preliminary registration for the National Olympics and the Sports Games should be completed by February 28, 1998.** Athletes who miss this initial registration deadline may still be eligible to participate in these events. They should seek clarifying information immediately. Lithuanians in the United States may register or obtain additional information by contacting:

Mr. Algirdas Bielskus
 General Secretary
 Lithuanian Athletic Union of North America
 3000 Hadden Road

Rimas Gedeika

The Road To Sydney

Only two more years until the Summer Olympic Games: where, in Sydney, Australia, the world's greatest athletes will gather together to pit their speed, strength and agility against each other in the hopes of becoming Olympic champions.

One such athlete, who is traveling on the road to Sydney, is Jurga Marcinkeviciute, Lithuania's best women's 800 meter runner.

Jurga's road to Sydney is very similar to the road traveled by many other track and field athletes, yet her journey has many unique physical and psychological challenges.

Jurga began her journey 13 years ago when she was ten years old and living in Alytai, Lithuania. Even at that young age Jurga already showed that she had speed to burn; that she was blessed with exceptional running skills.

One of the first people to recognize her talents was Valdas Grigas, who was to become her first coach. Under his watchful eye, she soon became one of Lithuania's best young middle-distance runners.

From about age 14 and continuing through her high school days, Jurga was selected to participate on numerous Lithuanian Junior Na-

tional Track and Field Teams. She competed in several European Junior Championships winning many awards and medals running distances anywhere from 600 to 1000 meters. Although she ran various middle distances; nevertheless, the 800 meter-run was both her favorite and best event.

Thus, after graduating from high school, Jurga began focusing all her mental and physical energies on running that distance. Her love for running was great, but her love for education, especially the sciences, was greater.

Shortly after entering Vilnius University, she made a very tough decision. She decided to give up running and to concentrate all her energies on her studies. But, as often is the case, fate intervened. Shortly after

making this decision, Jurga met Romas Sausaitis, one of Lithuania's best long distance runners, who helped rekindle her desire to run. Shortly thereafter, Romas became her coach and helped her back into top shape.

The year, 1995, was a major turning point in Jurga's life. That spring, Andrius Klemas, a Lithuanian marathon runner from



Jurga Marcinkeviciute at Villanova.

photo by Rimas Gedeika

RIMAS GEDEIKA, a marathon runner, is a senior product development analyst in an insurance corporation. He is also an avid Lithuanian sports enthusiast, especially marathon, and track and field.

America, came to visit Lithuania. After seeing Jurga run, he was so impressed with her natural abilities that he quickly began trying to persuade her to come to America to continue both her running and her academic careers at a University in the United States.

The decision was not easy. After evaluating all the pros and cons, Jurga decided to give it a try. She felt that the road would be rough, but if she wanted to be the best that she could be, she had to go where her potential could be realized.

Through Andrius's intercessions, Jurga received running scholarships from four major American universities. One of which was from Villanova University. Villanova University not only has one of the best track and field programs in the United States, it also has a very demanding academic program. Thus, to receive a running scholarship from Villanova, the athlete must display exceptional running abilities as well as the intellectual powers to handle its challenging academic program. Jurga was undaunted by these high standards. "Working hard was never a problem for me," she stated.

When Jurga received this scholarship, she became the first runner from Lithuania to receive such an award. (Note: In 1997 Agne Visockaite, Lithuania's best woman sprinter, became the second runner to receive a track and field scholarship. This came from Iowa State University).

The first stop on her road to Villanova was Seattle, Washington. Here she studied English and passed the required exams for entry into Villanova University. Autumn came, school started, and training began.

Things were looking up for Jurga but, not for long. As soon as she began to intensify her workouts, she began to experience pain in her left foot. A stress fracture that she had incurred while running in Lithuania,

was not healing properly and was becoming more painful every day. Her frustrations mounted; she wanted to train hard, to run faster, but now she could barely jog. To add to her physical difficulties, Jurga had to adjust to John Marshall's, Villanova's head track and field coach's, physical and mental training techniques.

"To make a complete adjustment from one coach to another takes about one year," said Jurga. "By then, if everything works out OK, you and the new coach should be on the same mental wave length, and, only then, will your training pick up."

Looking back, Jurga regards her freshman year, from an academic perspective to have been right on target. From a runner's point of view, she felt disappointed. Yet her running accomplishments are worth noting. For example, at the Big East Indoor Championships, Jurga placed 8th in the 800 meter run with a time of 2:18.35.

At the Penn Relays, Jurga ran in two relay teams. In the Distance Medley Relay, she ran the last and longest leg (1600 meters). It was mainly due to her fine last leg, that Villanova took third place. The next day she ran the anchor leg of the 4 x 800 meter relay. Again, largely do to her big kick on the last leg, Villanova won second place. In the Big East Outdoor Championships, she took fourth place in the 800 meter, and third place in the 1500 meter races.

Her sophomore year showed even greater improvement. She had adjusted to her new environment, and had fully recovered from her nagging injuries. Her training sessions were more intensive, more progressive. Most importantly, she understood and adjusted to John Marshall's training philosophy.

Being in peak condition, both physically

and mentally, Jurga showed everyone that she could run with the best of them and win. Although her accomplishments were many, the more notable ones follow:

- At the Big East Indoor Championships, she led her team to a first place finish in the 4 x 800 relay.
- At the Penn Relays, she helped Villanova win first place in both the Distance Medley and in the 4 x 1500 meter relays.
- At the NCAA Championships, Jurga ran her best 800 meter race. In the semifinals, she set her personal best time of 2:03.62. Later, in the finals, running against America's best college women runners, she placed 5th with a time of 2:05.68.
- At the Big East Outdoors Championships, Jurga ran a very gutsy, courageous 800 meter race. She won in 2:07.48, but the way she did it was truly awe inspiring. With 100 meters to go, Jurga was in fourth place. Everything looked hopeless; her legs felt as if they were made out of lead; her lungs -- as if they would burst any minute. Somewhere, within herself, Jurga found that extra ounce of strength, and courage which enabled her to give that extra kick and win at the tape! Jurga was not finished yet. Two hours later, she ran the 4 x 800 meter relay and helped win another first place for Villanova.

This day, these races, clearly showed that Jurga had what it took to win.

At the end of the season, the NCAA coaches, recognizing her excellent accomplishments, named her All American.

During her first two years, besides carrying all the usual running and the academic

pressures, she also had to shoulder pressures of a different kind. Being the first runner from Lithuania to have received a scholarship from an American university, she continuously faced pressures of not disappointing her former Lithuanian coach, and of showing to John Marshall and Villanova that they did not make a mistake when they gave her that scholarship.

She was also acutely aware that her attitude both on and off the track field, her work ethic, her academic achievements would influence the coaches as to how they would view other track and field athletes from Lithuania, and whether they would be granted scholarships.

What does the future hold for Jurga Marcinkeviciute? When asked this question, Jurga stated that at present her goals are: to represent Lithuania in this year's European Outdoor Championships; to obtain her Chemical Engineering degree within the next 18 months; and, after graduation until the year 2000, to continue training with John Marshall. Marshall is a highly respected track and field coach especially for training runners for the 800 meter run. One final goal is to run the 800 meter for Lithuania in the Summer Olympic Games.

The journey to Sydney is still long, having many unforeseen hazards, but with her positive attitude and her willingness to work hard, Jurga will overcome all those challenges and successfully complete her "Journey to Sydney."



Jeanne Dorr

Special Little Friends in Alytus

In Alytus, Lithuania, a special needs home provides all the components for children who are truly unique.

This month I would like to take you on a visit to the Alytus Home for Children with Special Needs. By now BRIDGES readers know I never just "visit" places in Lithuania. There is usually a story behind all my articles and this one is no exception. Regardless where I go or whatever I plan I seem to complicate matters. My husband always tells me that if I don't have a problem, I keep looking until I find one. So make yourself comfortable and join me on a journey that I definitely did not want to take.

A Child Leads the Way

I was fortunate to meet one of our foster children and his family from Alytus. It was especially exciting because the child's sponsor, Victor Stepalovitch, a Philadelphia resident, was there. Actually he was the one who arranged the visit for me.

I was introduced to little Donatas and his foster parents, Ramute and Kazimieras. The couple had one son who was in his twenties and living on his own. They had done a good job raising him and now it was time for them to sit back, relax, and enjoy life. But there was one small problem; a very small problem, and his name was Donatas. The thought of him spending his young years in the home and later in an orphanage haunted Ramute day and night. These thoughts gave her no peace.

Ramute worked in the Alytus Home for Children with Special Needs. As most people who see horrifying cases every day, she had to learn to separate her job from her personal life.

Donatas was brought to the hospital after he was abandoned by his mother. He had been left alone in his crib for almost a week by his mother. When he entered the hospital, he was in a very weakened condition. Later it was discovered that he could no longer use his legs; he was unable to even stand. Ramute was one of the people who gave him massages and baths. Donatas was becoming more and more attached to her, and she was breaking her own rule of not becoming personally involved.

One night she asked if she could take Donatas home for the night. The next time she asked if she could take him home for the weekend. It became harder and harder to take him back to the hospital on Monday mornings.

A Decision of Love

As Donatas regained his strength and the use of his legs, he would have to be placed in an orphanage. Now Ramute and Kazimieras were faced with a very serious decision. Did they have the strength to start over by being parents to a young child? Never mind that he was as cute as a button and as smart as a whip. Never mind that he loved them as much as they loved him. Were they really ready to have a child in kindergarten when many of their friends were grandparents? How about the



Donatas is overjoyed with his balloon; a simple yet very special gift that made him happy.

photo: Jeanne Dorr

JEANNE DORR is a member of the Board of Directors of Lithuanian Orphan Care, a branch of the Human Services Council of the Lithuanian-American Community, Inc. She is also a Social Studies teacher in New Jersey.

They gave him the gift of a family and his sponsor is helping to give him the gift of hope for the future.

expense of another child? These were working class people trying to make ends meet. After much soul searching they decided they loved this little boy too much to put him in an orphanage.

They gave Donatas the gift of a family and his sponsor is helping to give him the gift of hope for the future.

When I met him, he was a well-adjusted little chatter box. His mommy, daddy, and sponsor could not be more proud of him. I just have a feeling this little boy will have a bright future. But what would have happened to him if Ramute and Kazimieras put themselves first and allowed him to be sent to an orphanage?

Preconceived Ideas

So it was because of Donatas that I ended up visiting the Alytus Children's Home.

I really didn't want to go, and I was offering one feeble excuse after another. I knew the hospital primarily took care of children with cerebral palsy and Down's Syndrome. Once again ignorance and preconceived ideas almost got in my way. In my mind I pictured a dungeon-type hospital with neglected children tied into chairs or onto beds. I thought I would see a staff who would be uncaring and unfeeling. For these reasons I was making any excuse that came into my head.

But Ramute was persistent. She wanted me to see where she had found her precious Donatas, as well as the place where she worked. Finally she telephoned me in Kaunas and told me I had to come. There would be no more excuses.

Ramute arranged with the hospital's director to give me a tour. He was a busy doctor and this was a personal favor. Just what I needed — probably

some cranky, old administrator who was filled with his own self-importance.

I knew I couldn't face it alone. So, I contacted my New Jersey sidekick, Vincent Kreder. Vince had spent the last five years teaching in Lithuania, and was always open to visiting a new place.

So began our trip to Alytus. At this point my stomach was churning at what I thought I was going to see and experience.

As the bus pulled into the Alytus terminal, I could see Ramute smiling and waving. How could she be in such cheerful spirits knowing what we were about to experience?

Vincent and I enjoyed a lovely lunch with Ramute while she described some of the children we would see in the hospital. How could I ever tell this wonderful woman that I just didn't want to go? There wasn't a way, and we really couldn't drag this lunch out any longer. It was time to face reality.

A Pleasant Revelation

My first surprise of the day was that we were not entering a dungeon. It was a well-kept building with bright and cheery children's murals painted on the walls.

Our first stop was to visit the administrator. This was the second surprise of the day. We

were introduced to Dr. Alvydas Vitkauskas. He wasn't old and he wasn't cranky. He was one of the most down-to-earth administrators I had ever encountered. Within a few minutes, I realized his first concerns were the special needs children in his care, as well as his staff. He explained that the children here were newborns to about three years of age. Some were abandoned when their parents realized that they just couldn't care for a child with so many problems. The situation in Lithuania is quite different than in America. If a family decides to raise a child with special needs, they are invited



Dr. Vitkauskas, Vincent Kreder, and Ramute call to the children at the Alytus Children's Home.
photo: Jeanne Dorr

to bring the child to a Home for Special Needs Children for a day or for a weekend. This gives both parents and children a well-deserved rest; even if it's just for one night or a few days.

Dr. Vitkauskas expressed that there were too many needs and not enough money; a similar problem shared by administrators all over the world. He expressed a need for medicines that are not so far beyond the expiration dates that he was afraid to use them. This young doctor really impressed me when he said that he could not and would not give any medicine to the children in the home that he would not give to his own children.

I asked him how we could help him, and his only request was for videos showing the latest training and technology used in American hospitals or rehabilitation centers. He wanted his staff to see up-to-date methods which are being used to help special needs children in other parts of the world.

No problem, or so I thought. I was afraid he was going to ask for a new hospital wing, so this request would be a piece of cake. Well, in more than a year, I was able to send him only one tape. I never thought about copyrights, lawsuits, etc. It was like banging my head against the wall. It seems that most organizations I contacted did not have videos. Those that did were unwilling to share them. It was only through the efforts of a young man at the United Cerebral Palsy Center in Trenton, New Jersey, that I was finally able to obtain a video.

The Little Ones

It was now time for our tour. My stomach was calming down, but I still hadn't seen any of the children. As Dr. Vitkauskas and Ramute led us through the corridors, we were told to open any doors or enter any rooms. Nothing was off limits.

It was dinner time for the children. We entered a room with brightly painted murals on the wall. We saw dedicated and happy staff members feeding the children. The little ones were sitting around small tables. The staff were also sitting on the little chairs. They spoon-fed some, while they encouraged others to feed themselves. The task of lifting the spoon and getting the food either in the mouth or somewhere near it was an occasion of great joy and brought words of praise. There were no angry words about the food that was spilled, or that had rolled off the bibs and onto the floor or clothing. It was obvious the children were enjoying their dinner as much as the staff enjoyed feeding them.

In another room, younger children with less developed motor skills were in large playpens; three or four were in each playpen. There were several women in the room but, no one was sitting idly. Each one either held a child in her arms or rocked one in a rocking chair.

When they placed a little girl wearing yellow overalls in my



A Challenge For Us All

During my conversation with Dr. Vitkauskas, I suggested that perhaps some of our Lithuanian American organizations might take on the challenge of sending children's aspirin, cough medicine, and band-aids directly to the Home.

Dr. Vitkauskas said there was also a need for sturdy plastic toys, such as Fisher Price, which the children could use to practice their motor skills. A good example are the brightly-colored large plastic rings of different sizes which are stacked one on top of the other. Although, the hospital has enough children's clothing, they do lack shoes.

If your group is interested in any of these projects, please contact me through Lithuanian Orphan Care at:

Lithuanian Orphan Care
c/o Jeanne Dorr
4 Shrewsbury Yard
Riverton, New Jersey
08077

arms, my heart broke. I wanted to take each and every child home with me. The child snuggled against my face, and I only hoped she couldn't feel the salty tears coming down my cheeks. If I could have stopped the clock, I would have held that little angel forever. But, as always, it was time to move on.

Learning and Love

There was always learning taking place in each situation. Some of the little ones were learning to wash their hands; while others were learning to use a potty. They didn't seem to be the least bit embarrassed at having an audience. In fact, the potty room was one of the places in which we received the most smiles and waves from the children. They were receiving the most applause from the women as they delighted everyone with their accomplishments.

We visited another group of children who had finished their dinner and were engrossed with some toys. The children were enjoying themselves. Yet, the moment Dr. Vitkauskas approached the door, they all ran to greet him. He was overwhelmed with hugs and little hands trying to reach him. As busy as he was, he had time for each and every child.

The real superstar turned out to be Vincent. His brother is an assistant pastor of a rather large parish in New Jersey. The parish's youth group sent Vince balloons. He had enough foresight to bring some with him. Needless to say, Vince became the hero for this group of children. They squealed with delight as they reached for the brightly colored balloons. At that moment I wondered how many American children would be so excited about something as simple as a balloon. It takes so little to give joy to these children. I also wondered how long it took the women to calm their little charges after we left.

Dedication Abounds

We visited the newborns, as well as the children who were unable to sit or stand. Some did not open their eyes. They showed no reaction, and it was difficult to tell if they were sleeping or not. There were always women looking over the cribs or bassinets.

These were not people who were in this profession for the money. They were women who

truly loved each and every one of these precious children. The children in this home are special and unique. It takes a great deal of patience and love to work with them. They don't understand the first, second, or even third time they are told something. In fact, some may never understand.

As a teacher, I know the frustration these women must be feeling. Yet, my job isn't nearly as difficult as theirs. It takes dedicated and loving people to work with the children in this home; people who treat each child as an individual and a gift from God. The smiles and hugs they receive from these children give them the will to continue working in this profession.

Love Left Behind

We saw so many children that day: from those unable to hold up their heads to those who were chasing balloons. It was not in the least depressing, and I went away with a new respect for the administrators and workers in the health care profession.

I saw the tremendous strides Lithuania is making



A time to rest after a day of play and accomplishments.
Photo: Jeanne Dorr

with its special needs children in spite of a lack of money. I met an administrator who wanted nothing but the best for his children as well as his staff. I met a staff who cared deeply about these special children.

Most of all, I met the children who kept part of my heart with them in Alytus.

As for Donatas; he is a bright and happy little boy. What a difference that the love of a family can make in a little boy's life.

CURRENT EVENTS

PARTIAL LISTINGS OF THE LITHUANIAN INDEPENDENCE DAY COMMEMORATIONS HELD IN FEBRUARY:

- ✓ **Cleveland, Ohio...**Thomas Brazaitis, director of the Washington bureau of "The Plain Dealer", speaker, and special appearance by George Voinovich at the Lithuanian parish hall, Our Mother of God R.C. Church, at 6:30 pm, Feb. 14th. Special Mass, Feb. 15th.
- ✓ **Lemont, Illinois...**Regina Narusis, speaker; Our Blessed George Matulaitis Mission Choir; and the Maironis Lithuanian School children, at the Lithuanian World Center, Feb. 15th.
- ✓ **Brockton, Massachusetts...**Mirga Girnius, speaker, and the Boston Lithuanian Men's Quartet at the St. Casimir's parish hall, after Mass, Feb. 15th.
- ✓ **Cape Cod, Massachusetts...**Arvydas Barzdukas, speaker, and the Hartford Lithuanian Men's Trio at the Craigville Conference Center Manor, 1:00 pm, Feb. 16th.
- ✓ **Philadelphia, Pennsylvania...**Paul Goble and Asta Banionis, speakers; Vincas Kreve Lithuanian School children; the Zilvinas Lithuanian Dance Ensemble; and the St. Andrew's Church choir at the Lithuanian Center, 2715 E. Allegheny Ave., 2:00 pm, Feb. 15th. Special Mass at St. Andrew's Church, 10:30 am.
- ✓ **Waukegan/Lake County, Illinois...**Vladas Stankevicius, speaker; historical video featuring Independence Day Celebrations in Lithuania; and the Klumpe Lithuanian Folk Dance Ensemble at the Libertyville Civic Center, 1:30 pm, Feb. 22.
- ✓ **St. Petersburg, Florida...**Vilius Brazenas, speaker; the Lithuanian Club Choir; and the Lithuanian Club "Audra" Dance Group at The Lithuanian Club, 1:00 pm, Feb. 15th.
- ✓ **The 1st Annual Florida Lithuanian Festival...**opening ceremonies for the three-day event at the St. Jude Cathedral Center, St. Petersburg, 10:00 am, Feb. 20th.
- ✓ **Manhattan, New York...**Dr. Petras Anusas, speaker, and Soprano Angele Kiausaite accompanied by Aldona Kepalaite perform at the Ausros Vartai parish hall, 6:30 pm, Feb. 14th.
- ✓ **Los Angeles, California...**Darius and Ausra Semaska, speakers; and historical montage at the St. Casimir parish hall, after 10:30 am Mass, Feb. 22nd.
- ✓ **Seattle, Washington...**Asta Banionis, speaker, at the Latvian Center, 5:30 pm, Feb. 7th.
- ✓ **Elizabeth, New Jersey...**Vytautas Alksninis, speaker, and Soprano Angele Kiausaite accompanied by Julius Veblaitis on the violin at the Sts. Peter and Paul Lithuanian Church parish hall, after 11:00 am Mass.
- ✓ **Brooklyn, New York...**Algirdas Rimas, speaker; pianist Gabrielius Alekna and violinist Vilhelmas Cepinskis; and combined Apreiskimo and Atsimainymo Parish Choir at Lithuanian Cultural Center, 3:00 pm, Feb. 15th. Special Mass at Atsimainymo Church, Maspeth, 11:15 am.

 REFLECTIONS

Preparing for the Jubilee

By Sister Margarita Bareika

With the approaching millenium, Pope John II has requested that all Catholics throughout the world begin to prepare and celebrate the coming of the year 2000.

✠

Last year we stressed the importance of Christ in our lives. We focused on the person of Jesus Christ and the renewal of our commitment to a life of faith. Faith is a free gift of God. One of the most touching scenes in the gospel is the Baptism of Jesus. It is here that He comes to the water with the sinners and outcasts, ready to have His own life changed from being a village carpenter to becoming a preacher and a healer.

As Jesus came up from the water, He heard His Father's loving words, "You are my beloved Son, in You I am well pleased." (Mark 1, 11).

This marked the beginning of a new stage in Jesus' faith, the start of a new life.

Our Baptism is also the beginning of our Christian faith, and the start of a new life in the Lord's Church. We were asked to experience a deeper understanding of the Incarnation and of Jesus' birth from the Virgin Mary, and to renew our interest in the Bible and the Sacrament of Baptism.

✠

This year of 1998 is dedicated to the Holy Spirit and to His sanctifying presence within the Community of Christ's disciples. It means, appreciation of the Presence and activity of the Spirit who acts within the Church.

With the help of the Holy Spirit, members of the Church will evangelize our society with Gospel and bring new hope for the gift of eternal life.

✠

The third year —1999, is dedicated to God, the Father. It will be aimed at broadening the horizons of believers; so that they will see things in the perspective of Christ, and in the perspective of the Father, who is in heaven. The sense of being on a journey to the Father should encourage everyone to hold fast to Christ, the Redeemer of man.

✠

Jesus did not invite people just to receive from Him messages, but to learn from Him to do likewise.

Many Christians have thought that Jesus is only interested in the salvation of souls after their death. The promises expressed by the event of Jesus in our history are at the same time invitations and demands.

SISTER MARGARITA BAREIKA belongs to the order of The Sisters of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary, a Lithuanian order in Putnam, Connecticut. She is also the Chairperson of the Religious Affairs Council for the Lithuanian-American Community, Inc.

POLITICS

Asta Banionis

1998 Is Already a Historic Year

Presidential Election in Lithuania

Lithuania has a new president who will take office on February 26, 1998, and until a few short weeks ago, he was a naturalized American citizen who had just retired from a distinguished career as a federal civil servant. Valdas Adamkus is 71 years old and has lived most of his adult life in the United States. He, just like many of our Bridges readers, has followed the fate of his native country throughout the many years of political exile caused by the 50-year Soviet- occupation of Lithuania.

He was elected with 49.96 percent of the vote in a second round of voting which took place on Sunday, January 4th. His opponent was a former Prosecutor General of Lithuania Arturas Paulauskas who garnered 49.22 percent of the vote. In the final vote count, only 14,256 votes provided the margin of victory for Adamkus. Many people have already noted that watching the election results get tabulated Sunday night after the polls closed was akin to a closely matched championship basketball game where first one team pulls ahead, and the next minute the other. Supporters of both candidates held their breath through the long night, but by morning it was apparent that the people of Lithuania had gone to the polls and elected a candidate without the communist political baggage of the previous president, Algirdas Brazauskas. With Lithuania eager to join the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the European Union (EU), the election of Valdas Adamkus should improve both the country's image and its efforts to join these two institutions which will secure Lithuania firmly in the West. Many persons in the West still remember that Brazauskas told Bill Keller of the *New York Times* on March 12, 1990 that the vote to restore Lithuania's independence had been a mistake.

The departing president continues to enjoy high popularity ratings in the public opinion polls conducted in Lithuania. Throughout his five years as President he has received between 45 percent to 55 percent approval ratings, many times heading the list of popular

politicians. Nonetheless, the voters rejected his hand-picked candidate, Arturas Paulauskas — a curious choice since Brazauskas had fired Paulauskas from the position of Prosecutor General back in 1995 after Paulauskas had successfully prosecuted the Dekadnedze case. Bridges readers will recall that Dekadnedze was found guilty of master minding the assassination of *Respublika* editor Lingys, who had been leading a crusade against organized crime.

The Paulauskas campaign was well financed and well organized. Its central theme was that the people of Lithuania had "earned the right to live better", and that Arturas Paulauskas was the man to bring this about. But with the field narrowed to two candidates in the run-off election, voters began to focus on the LDDP (former communist party) machine which was providing substantial support to the candidate, as well as the monied dons standing in the shadows of the Paulauskas campaign. It also didn't help that Paulauskas' campaign manager, Arvydas Juozaitis (a former leader of Sajudis) got the campaign embroiled in an attack against emigre Lithuanians. Mr. Juozaitis in a paid campaign advertisement charged that Lithuanian immigrants from the West (the United States in particular) were "atejunai" whom Lithuania could do without. The word atejunai literally translates as "stranger". However, during the Soviet occupation of Lithuania the word came to be one of the epithets which Lithuanians used against the Soviet occupation forces and Soviet regime. There can be no doubt that equating Lithuanian-Americans with the Soviets who plundered, robbed, deported and murdered Lithuanians was campaign "overkill" which produced a backlash on Paulauskas during the last two weeks of campaigning. In fact, the mail-in ballots produced Adamkus' narrow margin of victory. Among the mail-in ballots was the overseas vote which went overwhelmingly for Adamkus. Here are the numbers: The total number of registered voters in Lithuania: 2,630,681. 1,937,786 or 73.66 percent voted in the second (run-off) round of the presidential

election. Paulauskas won the vote cast on election day in Lithuania by a small margin: Paulauskas received 912,394 votes while Adamkus garnered 909,907. But the mail-in ballots went to Adamkus giving him his 14,256 vote victory: Adamkus received 58,124 votes and Paulauskas received 41,381.

What kind of a president will Valdas Adamkus make? He brings with him an American managerial expertise which should help exact more efficiency from the government bureaucracy as well as better standards of behavior and ethics. His 23 year career in the Environmental Protection Agency will help to ensure that economic development in Lithuania does not come at the higher cost of a polluted environment. New investments should bring new technologies which produce a cleaner and safer environment than the one imposed on the Lithuanians by the central planners of the former Soviet Union. Adamkus speaks German and Polish in addition to English and his native Lithuanian which is a big plus for a leader of a small country which wants to participate in the fast-paced global market (Brazauskas spoke only Russian in addition to his native Lithuanian). He's also demonstrated that he can get by in Russian, having been an instructor of Russian language in the United States military many years ago. But there are drawbacks as well which are as much based on the fact that he is not a professional politician as they are that he has lived most of his adult life outside of his native Lithuania.

Bridges wishes the new president a successful term of office. With a good team around him, and in cooperation with the Seimas and Government (i.e., prime minister and cabinet) we trust that he will be able to bring his country along the final steps into NATO and EU. With Adamkus' leadership we can all hope that Lithuania will be better prepared as it meets the challenges of the next century.

The LAC, Inc. sponsored a group of our members as election observers during the first round of the presidential election. The group of 12 election observers were both Lithuanian-Americans who had travelled to Lithuania during the election, as well as Lithuanian-Americans and non-Lithuanian Americans who work or were visiting in Lithuania at the time.



Part of the Lithuanian delegation at the U.S-Baltic Charter signing ceremony at the White House East Room January 16, 1998. Seated from the left to right: Foreign Minister Algirdas Saudargas, Lithuania's Ambassador to the U.S. Stasys Sakalauskas, Presidential Advisor for Foreign Affairs Neris Germanas and Lithuanian Foreign Ministry Political Department Head Vygaudas Usackas.

We organized the group because the Russian Duma had threatened to send its own delegation to observe the Lithuanian presidential election. With no other international observers scheduled to be in Lithuania, we thought it would be important to have an American presence, particularly if the Russians were to show up. As it turned out the Russians were all bluster and no substance. There was no Russian Duma delegation, but our folks went ahead and visited sites mainly in and around Vilnius, Kaunas and Vilkaviskis. Most of the election observers reported what we thought we would see - an orderly and free election day process. However, one election observer did run into some harassment by Paulauskas campaign "election observers" who didn't like Americans hanging around the polling site. This is the same polling site where Mrs. Paulauskas voted that day and is a heavily Polish district.

Although there was little trouble during the actual election day, we had a devil of a time getting permission for our election observers to participate. Who was trying to block our participation? The head of the Chief Electoral Commission Mr. Vaigauskas. The reason for Mr. Vaigauskas' opposition still isn't completely clear to us today, but our thanks go out to the other Chief Electoral Commission members who argued our case. Particular thanks go to



Members of the Lithuanian-American Community's delegation to the U.S.-Baltic Charter signing ceremony. Seated in the first row left to right: LAC President Regina Narusis, LAC National Council Chairman Donatas Skucas, LAC Midwest Region Chairperson Birute Vindasius. In the second row clearly visible on right: Jeanne Dorr, board member of Philadelphia, PA LAC chapter. Behind Mrs. Vindasius is Dr. Vytautas Bieliauskas, Chairman of the LAC, Inc. Public Affairs Council. January 16, 1998 at the White House East Room.

U.S. Ambassador Keith Smith and his staff, among them Political Counselor Jonathan Moore for coming to our defense. They cut through whatever problems there were and got our 12 observers their election identification cards. We were proud to be Americans that day and to know that the U.S. government through its embassies across the world is there to help and defend American citizens and American values.

U.S. - Lithuania Relations Get a Boost

On January 16, 1998 the United States and Lithuania signed the "U.S.-Baltic Charter of Partnership" which is an executive agreement to broaden and deepen the long-standing relationship between the two countries about which Bridges readers are most concerned. The charter was negotiated by the U.S. State Department and the foreign ministries of Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia for the better part of last year (1997). It grew out of a Clinton Administration initiative to find ways to bolster the security and economic development of Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia.

The Lithuanian-American Community, Inc. (LAC, Inc.) opposed the formula of a U.S.-Baltic charter noting that this allows U.S.

government officials to ignore two real threats to Lithuania's long-term security, i.e., the growing dictatorship in Belarus and the Russian military transit from Kaliningrad through Lithuania's territory. LAC, Inc. preferred to see separate charters with each of the three Baltic countries, tailored to their individual security concerns. What U.S. government officials seem to have forgotten is that Lithuania's longest border is with Belarus, not Russia. Since Latvia and Estonia do not have either of these two problems, the charter that has been negotiated and signed has been able to avoid mentioning these issues.

Nonetheless, the U.S.-Baltic charter is a good next step on the road to NATO membership for Lithuania because the U.S. government has pledged, with the signature of the President of the United States, to help Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia get ready to meet NATO requirements. With the U.S. Congress having provided \$18.3 million for military assistance to Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia this fiscal year (FY1998), it is the hope of LAC, Inc. that Lithuania will use these new resources wisely to create an honorable armed services which will provide Lithuania with a credible defense and which NATO will want to invite into its defensive alliance. As the debate in the Congress begins on the new budget, Bridges readers should gear up to support continued military

LAC National Council Chairman Donatas Skucas, LAC President Regina Narusis and LAC's Public Affairs Office Director Asta Banionis found time to chat with Deputy Secretary of State Strobe Talbott after the U.S.-Baltic Charter signing ceremony. The White House on January 16, 1998.



assistance for Lithuania in the FY 1999 appropriations bills.

The U.S.-Baltic charter also establishes several mechanisms to carry on the day-to-day strengthening of relations between these four countries. The bi-lateral working group on defense chaired by Undersecretary of Defense Walter Slocombe has existed for some time, but it will now enjoy the status of a formal mechanism that is integrated into an overall U.S. policy. The bi-lateral working group for economic issues will be chaired by Undersecretary of State Stuart Eizenstat. And there will be an overall U.S.-Baltic Commission chaired by Deputy Secretary of State Strobe Talbott which will oversee the work of the bi-lateral working groups as well as take up other issues as they develop in the relationship. The first meeting of this commission is not expected to occur until the end of the summer, and we promise to bring you updates on the work of the bi-lateral working groups as well as the commission over the next year.

During the week that preceded the charter signing ceremony, President Brazauskas and Foreign Minister Saudargas signed a number of bi-lateral treaties with the United States. One of the treaties eliminates the problem of double taxation, so that if you're an American working in Lithuania or a Lithuanian working in the United States, you only pay income tax to one government, not both. The other treaty is one that will assist U.S. investment in Lithuania. There were also briefings on the U.S. assistance package that has been developed under the Administration's Baltic Action Plan. This year a great deal of assistance, as it should, focusses on the fight against organized crime and government corruption.

LAC, Inc. along with other Lithuanian-American organizations were asked to have representatives at the signing ceremony for the U.S.- Baltic Charter which took place in the White House East Room on Friday, January 16, 1998 in the early afternoon. The room held about 180 participants, the vast majority of whom were government agency representatives. By my count, there were only 33 Lithuanians in the room and that included the Lithuanian government's delegation. President Brazauskas brought with him Lithuania's Foreign Minister Algirdas Saudargas, the head of the Political

Department Vygaudas Usackas (who had helped negotiate the charter), the president's foreign policy advisers Neris Germanas and Algirdas Gričius, the head of the president's protocol Valteris Baliukonis, and of course, Lithuania's relatively new Ambassador Stasys Sakalauskas and the embassy's counselor Darius Semaska accompanied President Brazauskas.

The Lithuanian-American Community, Inc. was represented by its president Mrs. Regina Narusis, the chairman of the National Council of the LAC, Inc. Mr. Donatas Skucas, and Chairman of the Public Affairs Council Vytautas Bieliauskas. We were also able to get three of our best public affairs activists into the event representing all of our wonderful public affairs volunteers across the country. They were: Mrs. Birute Vindasius, regional chair for the Midwest Region; Jeanne Dorr, member of the Philadelphia, PA chapter board of directors; and Saulius Anuzis, president of the Lansing, MI chapter. If the White House had given us more slots, we would have invited many more LAC, Inc. members. But since both C-span (the Congressional cable station) covered the entire event and CNN also provided live coverage, those of you who watched the event from the comfort of your home or office probably had a better view than those assembled in the East Room.

After the signing ceremony, the White House treated a larger group of participant to a formal reception at Blair House. Vice President Al Gore was the host of the event and stayed for most of it shaking hands with every guest. The Lithuanian-American Community, Inc. was able to get into that event about 35 members of our organization who are responsible for LAC, Inc. activities either at the national, regional or local level. The White House Office of Public Liaison commented that we, at LAC, Inc., had good regional representation of our organization (i.e., the people didn't all come from the Greater Washington, DC area).

On the following day, Saturday, the LAC, Inc. hosted a luncheon in honor of the Lithuanian delegation and both Foreign Minister Saudargas and President Brazauskas were kind enough to speak during the luncheon. Over 120 persons attended the luncheon at the prestigious Mayflower Hotel in downtown Washington, DC, just a few blocks north of the White House.

Foreign Minister Saudargas, speaking in flawless English, provided a very heart-warming and candid glimpse into the negotiating process and reminded everyone that Lithuania, even in the darkest days of WW II and the Soviet occupation, had always been an ally of the United States. President Brazauskas speaking through an interpreter spoke to the accomplishments of his Administration in the field of foreign policy. Mrs. Regina Narusis speaking on behalf of the Lithuanian-American Community, Inc. provided an analysis of the charter and reminded the U.S. government and the Russian government (who had not been invited to the event) that Lithuania and Lithuanian-Americans were going to overcome any obstacle put in their way to NATO membership. Mrs. Narusis said, "To get Lithuania into NATO, we're going to go around the obstacle, or we'll go over the obstacle or even under the obstacle. And if we have to, we'll push the obstacle out of our way and get through directly." So, the LAC, Inc. has put the Russian government on notice ..."Get out of our way, because we're going to do everything we can to make sure Lithuania gets an invitation to NATO in 1999".

As part of the effort to get Lithuania an invitation in what is expected to be a second round of enlargement in early summer, 1999, the LAC, Inc. asked Foreign Minister Saudargas to visit some of our chapters when he came into Washington, DC for the charter signing ceremony. The Foreign Minister graciously obliged us, and our thanks go out to all of the LAC, Inc. chapter board of directors and the hundreds of volunteers who helped make the Foreign Minister's visits a success. The Foreign Minister was able to visit Detroit, Michigan on Saturday, January 10, where he was able to meet not only with a large audience of local chapter members (several hundred), but visit the Lithuanian Saturday language school operated by LAC, Inc. He also met at lunch with a group of organizational leaders and Congressman John Dingell (D-MI), the senior member of the Michigan Congressional delegation stayed throughout the lunch and had a very in-depth conversation about US-Lithuania relations. Congressman Dingell, who is of Polish heritage, expressed a keen interest in visiting Lithuania this spring. Then the Foreign Minister flew off to Hartford, Connecticut. He is the first high-ranking Lithuanian government official to ever visit Hartford. The local chapter worked with

the regional board and the other five chapters in Connecticut to bring together a very representative audience for the Foreign Minister. On Sunday morning, January 11, the Foreign Minister drove up to Boston and Worcester. The Worcester meeting became a Massachusetts region-wide meeting with many Knights of Lithuania districts sending representatives to the event. Sunday evening the Foreign Minister flew down to St. Petersburg, Florida which is the largest of the LAC, Inc. chapters in Florida. There he was given the keys to the city and feted by the city council. He gave a speech to a three hundred plus audience at the Lithuanian Hall, and then flew back to New York City in time to meet President Brazauskas' incoming plane from Vilnius. After the signing ceremony the following weekend, Foreign Minister went to the large Lithuanian-American community in Cleveland, Ohio before flying home to Lithuania on Sunday, January 18. A whirlwind tour, but a very productive one. The message which Foreign Minister Saudargas brought to our members was a simple but very important one — Lithuania still needs you. If Lithuania is to be safe and secure, it needs to have strong allies like the United States. The job of Lithuanian-Americans defending and speaking for the interests of an independent and democratic Lithuania is not over. The Foreign Minister commented that if Lithuanian-Americans would work as hard now, as they did in 1990 and 1991, Lithuania would surely get its invitation into NATO sooner rather than later. He explained the threats to Lithuania's security and continued independence and urged all Lithuanian-Americans to not turn away from Lithuania.

The message was well received everywhere he went. It is an important message which needs to be heard by every chapter. We've asked the Foreign Minister to consider coming back to the United States and visit many of our other chapters. The Foreign Minister was accompanied to most of these events by Lithuania's Ambassador Stasys Sakalauskas who entered Lithuania's foreign service in the spring, 1990 when Mr. Saudargas was just beginning as Lithuania's post-WW II Foreign Minister to rebuild Lithuania's foreign service. If you'd like the Foreign Minister to visit your chapter this year, please contact our public affairs office in Washington, DC at 703-524-0698.

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