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## Decolonisation in Lithuania?

### Revisiting the Concept of Cultural Resistance under Foreign Rule since 1990

Russia's assault on Ukraine has catalysed a widespread revision of the politics and history of domination in the region through the lens of colonialism<sup>1</sup>. The reaction of the Baltic states to Russia's renewed aggression has been characterised as a form of vicarious identification, through which society and the state do more than simply voice solidarity: they have identified themselves with Ukraine's suffering, evoking the memory of their own experience of totalitarian and imperial subjection, generating a "decolonizing moment of sorts"<sup>2</sup>.

On the surface, this decolonising moment is most visible in the iconoclasm sweeping the region since February 2022. In Latvia, a 79-meter-tall monument to Soviet victory in World War II was detonated in Riga<sup>3</sup>. In Estonia, the Ministry of Defence took urgent action to remove a Soviet war memorial from Narva, a town bordering Russia, and a government commission was established to tag all Soviet-era monuments for removal<sup>4</sup>. Even in Finland, the World Peace Statue gifted by the Soviet Union in 1989 was removed from Helsinki<sup>5</sup>.

In Lithuania, 26 municipalities had by June 2022 requested the Ministry of Culture to strip Soviet memorials of their status as listed heritage objects. The parliament went a step further and adopted a law that mandates removing all monuments promoting totalitarian or authoritarian ideology from public spaces<sup>6</sup>. The principal monument to victory in the "Great Patriotic War" was promptly removed from the Antakalnis cemetery in Vilnius (fig. 1) and put into temporary storage. Meanwhile, municipalities across the country are compiling lists of additional monuments that may be subject to removal under the terms of the ban.

Compared to Latvia and Estonia, Lithuania has a relatively small population of ethnic Russians, distinguished by a high level of social integration, so removing Soviet war monuments has generated relatively little antagonism. Instead, controversy has

centred on monuments to the creative intelligentsia of Soviet Lithuania: intellectuals, writers, artists and performers who did not leave the country when Lithuania was forcibly annexed to the USSR in 1940 and continued to work in their profession, as well as subsequent generations of the intelligentsia who were educated and trained at Soviet institutions in the post-war period.

In fact, the greatest controversy has erupted not over the decommissioning of an existing monument, but in opposition to a plan to commission a new monument to the literary legacy of Justinas Marcinkevičius (1930–2011; fig. 2), a popular Lithuanian writer during the late Soviet period. Plans to erect a monument to Marcinkevičius's work, especially a poetic trilogy written in the 1970s, have been mooted ever since his passing, especially as he was one of the iconic figures of *Sąjūdis*, the popular movement against Soviet rule. The Writers' Union applied to the Vilnius city council with a proposal in July 2023, however, at the peak of the current wave of anti-Soviet iconoclasm. Faced with an outcry from activists, the city council wavered, and the Writers' Union was pressured to withdraw its application<sup>7</sup>.

This paper aims to situate current debates about the role of the creative intelligentsia of Soviet Lithuania in the broader context of efforts to shape public history through the commissioning and decommissioning of monuments since the restoration of independence. As records show, the recent adoption of the iconoclastic law codifies and looks like it may accelerate practices that have evolved over the past decade.

#### The Commissioning and Decommissioning of Memory

The current focus on statues of the Soviet Lithuanian cultural elites is conditioned by the fact that most other Soviet-era monuments were removed shortly after



Fig. 1: Monument and eternal flame at the memorial to Soviet soldiers (erected in 1984, sculptor Juozas Burneika, architect Rimantas Dičius) in Antakalnis cemetery, Vilnius, in its original location before summer 2022. Photo: Cmapm (Wikimedia Commons), 2007.



Fig. 2: Justinas Marcinkevičius at a meeting of Sajūdis in Vingis Park, Vilnius. Photo: Algirdas Sabaliauskas, 11 June 1989.



the restoration of independence. In July 1990, the parliament passed a resolution to remove 42 monuments, ten of which were in Vilnius. These included monuments to Lenin; Vincas Mickevičius-Kapsukas (1880–1935), one of the founders of the Lithuanian Communist Party; another five to local Bolshevik leaders; Soviet partisans; and General Ivan Chernyakhovsky, the leader of the 3rd Belarussian Front of the Red Army, which reconquered Lithuania after the German occupation<sup>8</sup>.

The monument to Chernyakhovsky was removed in 1990 and his remains were reburied in Moscow. Still, a political compromise was made to protect memorials to Soviet soldiers, in view of the menace of Soviet troops still on Lithuanian territory. An ensemble of statues adorning the Green Bridge (*Žalioji tiltas*; fig. 3) in Vilnius was spared as they were deemed to have unique architectural value<sup>9</sup>. Statues, memorial plaques and street names associated with Soviet-era writers and artists were also preserved on the premise that their works constituted a form of cultural resistance in their contributions to the Lithuanian language, culture and identity.

According to the recollection of Vytautas Toleikis, the formula of cultural resistance and its moral ambivalence was articulated at the time as a kind of division of labour. Those writers who collaborated were said to have saved the nation. Those who dissented were said to have saved the honour of the nation. Marcinkevičius was often mentioned as a prime example of a writer who saved the nation by ensuring the survival and development of the Lithuanian language and culture, and by preserving a sense of national self-awareness<sup>10</sup>.

These debates were highly polarised in early 1990s, as recalled by Vitas Karčiauskas, an active participant in discussions at the time, and currently a department head at the Genocide and Resistance Research Centre in Vilnius. For some, he says, Salomėja Nėris (1904–1945) was a wonderful poet whose contribution to Lithuanian culture demanded respect, if not reverence, while others considered her a traitor. In the end, Karčiauskas asserts, in today's context, it was decided that it should be left to future generations to decide the fate of monuments to Nėris and other Soviet writers and intellectuals<sup>11</sup>.



Fig. 3: The composition *Agriculture* by Bernardas Bučas and Petras Vaivada erected on the Green Bridge in Vilnius in 1952 and removed in June 2015. Photo: Wikimedia Commons.

A second wave of anti-Soviet iconoclasm was triggered by Russian aggression against its neighbours: Georgia in 2008 and Ukraine in 2014. In each case, Russia's military action was accompanied by a sudden escalation of historical revisionism that revived the imagery and tropes of Soviet propaganda used during World War II and the Cold War. In the Baltics and elsewhere, this aggression catalysed a trend to "securitise memory", whereby public historical discourse would be regulated to ensure that malicious disinformation about the past was not spread in a way that promoted hatred and eroded social cohesion<sup>12</sup>.

These developments occurred just when the European Council developed a Framework Decision that called on EU member states to criminalise public acts of condoning, denial or gross trivialisation of genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes<sup>13</sup>.



Fig. 4: Four pairs of Socialist Realist statues on the Green Bridge over the Neris River, Vilnius, from 1952, relocated in 2015. From left: Academic Youth by the sculptors Juozas Mikėnas and Juozas Kėdainis; and Guarding Peace by Bronius Pundzius. Photo: Chad Kainz (Wikimedia Commons), 2010.

When Lithuania implemented this decision through its national legislation, it intentionally included the public condoning, denial or gross trivialisation of Soviet and Nazi German aggression and other state crimes committed by these regimes as criminal acts – defined as “hate crimes” under the law<sup>14</sup>.

In fact, Lithuania was among the first European states to ban the public display of communist symbols, along with Nazi imagery, with both defined as “totalitarian or authoritarian regimes” (Art. 524 of the “Code of Administrative Offences”, adopted in 2008)<sup>15</sup>. Two years later another ban followed on the public “condoning, justification, trivialisation or denial of the aggression of the USSR or Nazi Germany against the Republic of Lithuania or their crimes of genocide or other crimes against humanity, or war crimes or other grave crimes or felonies” (Art. 170.2 of the “Criminal Code”, adopted in 2010)<sup>16</sup>.

The impact of these laws and regulations was reinforced by lobbying at the European level by Lithuania and like-minded states for an overhaul of civic education, so that Europeans would learn about communism and its crimes the same way they had been taught to assess Nazi crimes. This led to the establishment of a “European Day of Remembrance for Vic-

tims of Stalinism and Nazism”; the adoption by the European Parliament of the resolution entitled “On European Conscience and Totalitarianism”; and a similar resolution called the “Vilnius Declaration”, adopted by the Organization of Security and Co-operation in Europe in 2009<sup>17</sup>.

Russia’s invasion of Ukraine in 2014 provoked a new wave of anti-Soviet iconoclasm, with renewed attention turning towards the ensemble of Socialist Realist statues on the Green Bridge in Vilnius, which had been spared in the early 1990s and had even been included on the national list of protected monuments maintained by the Ministry of Culture<sup>18</sup>. In the wake of the Russian invasion, a petition was launched by civil society groups for the removal of the statues, especially since one of them, Guarding Peace (fig. 4), portrayed two Soviet soldiers and was associated with the Soviet victory in World War II<sup>19</sup>.

In 2015, the Ministry of Culture passed a regulation that added Nazi and communist symbols, as well as “images of German national socialists or leaders of the Communist Party of the USSR responsible for the repression of the Lithuanian population” to the list of criteria used to determine the status and significance of immovable cultural property. The amendment did



not ban such monuments completely but allowed them to be struck from the list. The statues were removed from the Green Bridge in June 2015, with considerable artistic flare, ostensibly for “restoration work”, and were formally removed from the list of protected heritage objects in 2016. In 2021, the statues were transferred to the National Museum of Lithuania, which plans to display them at the Former Detention House, an exhibition site dedicated to the late Soviet period<sup>20</sup>.

Controversy surrounding the Green Bridge coincided and mingled with another scandal, concerning a memorial plaque to Jonas Noreika (1910–1947), a member of the Lithuanian Activist Front, the anti-semitic organisation that sought to collaborate with the Nazis to overthrow the Soviet regime. As the governor of the Šiauliai district, Noreika signed orders in 1941 confining local Jews to a ghetto and confiscating their property. He was arrested by the Germans in 1943 for refusing to raise a Waffen-SS division from the local population. He emerged as a member of the anti-Soviet resistance from 1944 until his arrest and execution in 1947<sup>21</sup>. With this chequered background, Noreika is revered by some as a national hero for his resistance to the Soviets and reviled by others as a Nazi collaborator. Several monuments were erected in his honour across the country, including a commemorative plaque mounted in 1997 on the prominent library building of the Academy of Sciences in Vilnius (fig. 5). While these and several other monuments to individuals implicated in the Holocaust attracted occasional criticism from abroad, they were not subject to sustained public attention in Lithuania until the Soviet statues were removed from the Green Bridge.

In 2015, however, a group of public intellectuals and activists led by Sergejus Kanovičius, including Vytautas Toleikis, Tomas Venclova and the late Leonidas Donskis, signed an open letter demanding that the commemorative plaque to Noreika be removed from the library of the Academy of Sciences. The popular journalist Rimvydas Valatka wrote a scathing critique of Noreika as a collaborator, condemning the ongoing effort to make him into a hero as misguided<sup>22</sup>.

As a counterpart to decommissioning “offending” monuments, the goal of shaping public memory was also pursued by commissioning new monuments,



Fig. 5: Memorial plaque to Jonas Noreika, placed on the wall of the library of the Academy of Sciences in Vilnius in 1997. Photo: Alma Pater (Wikimedia Commons), 2007.

most significantly to commemorate the legacy of active resistance against the Soviet rule. Before 2014, numerous monuments had been erected across the country to commemorate the death of individual partisans, the places of significant camps and battles, and other “martyrological” sites, primarily by the relatives of fallen partisans and non-governmental societies, and most often in remote, rural areas. Since 2014, however, no fewer than 23 such monuments have been erected, increasingly in central, urban sites, and increasingly on the initiative of municipal and state bodies, significantly boosting the visibility and prestige of this legacy<sup>23</sup>.

The commissioning of new monuments to anti-Soviet partisans was part of a more general campaign to elevate the experience of anti-Soviet resistance as the highest example of civic valour, and to formally incorporate the history of the resistance into the history of the state. Building on a prior decision of the gover-

ment to recognise a partisan body established in 1949 as “the sole legal authority within the territory of occupied Lithuania”, the Seimas in 2009 even retroactively proclaimed General Jonas Žemaitis, a partisan leader executed by the Soviets in 1953, as the fourth President of Lithuania (serving from 16 February 1949 to 26 November 1954)<sup>24</sup>.

At the same time, lawmakers dedicated 2018, the centennial of Lithuanian independence, to the memory of Colonel Adolfas Ramanauskas (1918–1957), the last leader of the partisans. In June of that year, his remains were exhumed from an anonymous grave and reburied at the Antakalnis cemetery in a high-profile state funeral, attended by the heads of state and government, and representatives of 30 nations. In October, the Seimas declared Ramanauskas to be the fifth President of Lithuania (serving from 26 November 1954 until his death on 29 November 1957)<sup>25</sup>.

### Defining the Scope of Collaboration

Against the background of this campaign to elevate the history of the anti-Soviet resistance as the sole legitimate narrative of the period of Soviet occupation, the truce reached in 1990 concerning monuments to the Soviet Lithuanian intelligentsia was undermined. When memory is focused on the heroism of the few who resisted foreign rule, empathy for the position of those who accommodated that rule is inevitably diminished. The argument that “we were working for Lithuania”, most famously expressed in the memoirs of Algirdas Brazauskas, the first President of independent Lithuania – and the last First Secretary of the Communist Party of the LSSR – becomes less persuasive<sup>26</sup>.

In this connection, it is noteworthy that the Lithuanian parliament recently passed a resolution to commemorate those who took up arms in active resistance against the German occupation. The resolution, which received unanimous support, recommends that the President award military ranks and posthumous decorations to the participants in the anti-Nazi resistance in the Lithuanian ghettos, name schools, streets and squares in towns and cities after them, and maintain old Jewish cemeteries and sites

of mass killings in a manner more befitting their importance<sup>27</sup>.

This effort to commemorate the heroism of the anti-Nazi resistance is new in Lithuania, and it reveals how the commemoration of people and events of the Nazi and Soviet periods has evolved in a tandem fashion. Indeed, the targeting of monuments to Soviet collaborators intensified as a reaction to campaigns to remove monuments to Nazi collaborators from the streets of Vilnius. In the summer of 2019, Mayor Remigijus Šimašius ordered the removal of the plaque to Noreika in Vilnius. After much debate, the city council decided to rename a street named after Kazys Škirpa (1895–1979), a Lithuanian officer and diplomat who, in the words of the mayor, “promoted the Holocaust”<sup>28</sup>.

As if to balance these moves, in the fall of 2019, the Historical Memory Commission of the Vilnius City Council submitted a request to the Genocide and Resistance Research Centre (GRRC) of Lithuania to provide an assessment of whether Petras Cvirka (1909–1947), a writer, Chairman of the Writers' Union of the LSSR, editor of the literary journal *Pergalė* (Victory) and a deputy to the Supreme Soviet of the LSRR, had collaborated with the Soviet authorities and whether this had significant consequences for the Lithuanian people. The Centre defined collaboration as “conscious, significant and voluntary aid for the purposes of the occupier”. It assessed that Cvirka had indeed collaborated, causing significant harm to the Lithuanian state and its citizens. The assessment was based essentially on Cvirka’s role as a member of the Communist Party, his election to the sham parliament in 1940, and the role of this sham parliament in requesting Lithuania’s incorporation in the USSR<sup>29</sup>.

Cvirka was just one of several Lithuanian intellectuals co-opted by the Soviet regime. Still, he was the first to be targeted because of the large monument erected in his honour in 1959, created by the famous Lithuanian sculptor Juozas Mikėnas (1901–1964) and located in the capital. The campaign to remove Cvirka’s monument was initially opposed by Mayor Šimašius and the Minister of Culture, Mindaugas Kvietauskas. However, political pressure, building on the mutually reinforcing process of iconoclasm

against Soviet and Nazi collaborators, eventually prevailed<sup>30</sup>.

From this point onwards, opposition to the iconoclastic impulse would come only from artists and heritage specialists. Among politicians, the issue had been laid to rest. The decision of the city council to remove the statue to Cvirka in November 2021 was subjected to a performative critique by two artists, Eglė Grebliauskaitė and Agnė Gintalaitė (fig. 6, 7). They covered the condemned statue with artificial green moss, to symbolise the passing of time and the need to remember, shortly before it was physically dismantled<sup>31</sup>.

In their activism, these artists and academics were not seeking to defend the person or historical legacy of Cvirka, but rather to criticise the presentism of those seeking to remove monuments associated with the difficult past from public view. As asserted in the online manifesto of the artists Grebliauskaitė and Gintalaitė:

*“The historical landmarks of past ideologies – the monuments of the Soviets, colonial figures and ideas – today evoke a lot of emotions and discussions. [...] they are seen as symbolically impure: out of place, too painful or dangerous. However, destroying and forgetting them is not a way to heal.”<sup>32</sup>*

As also the historian Valdemaras Klumbys pointed out, cleansing the city of monuments erected by earlier regimes actually reproduces Soviet culture and mirrors the re-writing of history as practised in Russia<sup>33</sup>. Such refined arguments would quickly be swept away by Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022<sup>34</sup>.

### The Effects of the New Law of 2022

The law prohibiting the propagation of totalitarian and authoritarian regimes and their ideologies adopted in December 2022 builds on the political practice that had evolved up to that point. It bans any public object that represents organisations, events, dates, symbols or information “that promote totalitarian, authoritarian regimes and their ideologies”, as well as individuals who are “known to have acted in political, military and

repressive structures, or in the central structures of the occupation government and actively participated in making decisions that had an impact on the occupation’s political, military and repressive structures”<sup>35</sup>. Notably, the law does not use the term “collaborator”. As noted by Alvydas Nikžentaitis, the director of the Lithuanian Institute of History, legislators had to tread carefully to avoid painting themselves into a corner, where they would oblige the municipalities to “decommunise” everything associated with anyone who held a position of authority during the Soviet period. This includes virtually everyone who played a role in restoring Lithuanian independence in 1990. After all, Lithuania had among the highest levels of “titular nation” participation in Communist Party structures among the former republics of the USSR<sup>36</sup>.

The law came into effect on 1 May 2023 and its implementation began within a 20-day period during which municipalities were obliged to produce a list of objects within their boundaries that were potentially in violation of the ban. This was to be submitted to the Genocide and Resistance Research Centre of Lithuania. Ultimately, the decision to remove a monument is to be taken by its director, on the advice of a commission of nine individuals delegated by the Ministry of Culture, Vilnius University, Vytautas Magnus University in Kaunas, the Vilnius Academy of Arts, the Institute of Lithuanian History, the Secretariat of the International Commission for the Evaluation of the Crimes of the Nazi and Soviet Occupation Regimes in Lithuania, the Union of Lithuanian Political Prisoners and Exiles, and the Association of Lithuanian Municipalities.

Since then, municipalities have been compiling lists of public monuments for decommissioning or amendment, including statues and memorial plaques, as well as the designation of streets, squares, public buildings and schools named after Soviet-era intellectuals, writers, artists and performers. In the capital, for instance, the Vilnius Historical Memory Commission has proposed removing all public monuments to three Soviet-era writers who also supported Lithuania’s incorporation into the USSR in 1940: in addition to Salomėja Nėris and Petras Cvirka, Liudas Gira (1884–1946)<sup>37</sup>.





Fig. 6: Monument to Petras Cvirka in Vilnius, by the sculptor Juozas Mikėnas, 1959. Here covered in moss by artists Eglė Grebliauskaitė and Agnė Gintalaitė in November 2021. Photo: Audrius Tuleikis (mossstruction.com), courtesy of Eglė Grebliauskaitė.



Fig. 7: Monument to Cvirka covered in moss, before being dismantled. Still from the film *5 valandos skvere* (5 hours in the square), 2023, authored by Eglė Grebliauskaitė and Andrius Seliuta von Rath. Courtesy of Eglė Grebliauskaitė.

The chair of the commission emphasised that this was merely a preliminary list and that more names would be proposed, including those of Juozas Banaitis (1908–1967), who served as the chairman of the Radio Committee and Minister of Culture of the LSSR; the poet Teofilis Tilvytis (1904–1969), who served as the secretary of the Writers Union and a deputy to the Supreme Soviet of the LSSR; and the actor Vasilijus Kačialovas (1875–1948), whose role in the Soviet occupation of Lithuania is harder to discern, except that he was named a People’s Artist of the USSR in 1936, and attended a gymnasium in Vilnius in the same class as Felix Dzerzhinsky, the founder of the first Soviet secret service, which would eventually be called the KGB<sup>38</sup>.

Indeed, while the scope of the law is wide, it does not go as far as the most radical of iconoclasts would like. One of the proposals made to the parliamentary committee charged with drafting the law, offered by the Lithuanian Hunting Society, would have banned monuments to any

*“collaborator of the Soviet occupation, agent of soft power, laureates of the Stalin Prize or the USSR State*



*Prize, academicians of the Academy of Sciences of the USSR and propagandists of the USSR, including but not limited to university professors, artists, singers, artists, writers, painters, newspaper editors and journalists*<sup>39</sup>.”

The radicalism of such memory activists ultimately provoked a reaction. When the iconoclastic gaze turned to Marcinkevičius, the debate became explicitly political. No less a figure than Gitanas Nausėda, the President of Lithuania, spoke out in defence of the last generation of the Soviet Lithuanian intelligentsia, of which writers and poets were the most celebrated representatives: “Justinas Marcinkevičius built a monument that no ideological inquisitor of the 21st century can tear down. His verse, and the verse of the other famous poets who were part of Sąjūdis, were among the greatest songs we had in the 20th century.”<sup>40</sup> The fact that President Nausėda was recently revealed to have joined the Communist Party in 1988 probably contributed to his outspoken defence of Marcinkevičius. Nausėda called his decision to join the party – at a time when massive anti-Soviet rallies were already held – a youthful mistake, necessary to advance his academic career<sup>41</sup>.

The debate shows no sign of abating. The popular writer Kristina Sabaliauskaitė is among many who rejected the President’s position, asserting that songs of the Soviet period, like the trilogy of Marcinkevičius, are infected with communist lies and propaganda no matter how cherished they were by the masses. By likening Marcinkevičius to Brazauskas, she seems to reject the notion of writing under Soviet rule as an act of cultural resistance<sup>42</sup>.

## Conclusion

Today, the glorification of the armed resistance against the Soviets, and now against the Nazis too, and the hard emphasis placed on the crimes of totalitarianism in public discourse are coupled with the fading of the memory of the popular movement and the challenges of life under late socialism. As a result, yesterday’s heroes, e.g. Marcinkevičius, are being portrayed by some as villains. The displacement of the popular movement against Soviet rule by the memory of more active periods of armed resistance

echoes the 2018 removal in Budapest of the monument to Imre Nagy, executed for his role in the Hungarian Uprising of 1956 – to make way for a monument to the victims of the 1919 Red Terror, justified as an effort to erase the traces of the communist era in the capital<sup>43</sup>.

One question that has yet to be raised concerns the role of Lithuanian intellectuals who continued their work under the German occupation. In a study of the issue tellingly entitled *Neparklupdyta mūza* (literally, The unspoiled muse), Vytautas Kubilius asserts the validity of the cultural resistance thesis. At that time, he wrote, “culture was understood as the principal fortress of the defence of the nation, which has to be strengthened in whatever way possible”<sup>44</sup>. With attitudes hardening towards Soviet-era collaboration recently, it may be only a matter of time before the question of Lithuanian writers who published in Nazi-controlled newspapers and journals comes into focus.

It is too soon to say how far this wave of iconoclasm will go, or what character it will ultimately assume. Ann Rigney once argued that iconoclasm can play a progressive role insofar as the confrontation with “the intolerable presence of the old” offers a “tangible focus for marking out differences and demanding change in the politics of visibility”. But she also warned that, if pushed too far, “iconoclasm may end up becoming an end in itself”, distracting from the issues “that drove the demand for mnemonic change in the first place”<sup>45</sup>. To date, the impulse to reject all monuments to figures associated with the Soviet regime has not been marked by a great deal of introspection or efforts to work through the participation of the local community in the Soviet and German occupations, including their roles as beneficiaries or collaborators in acts of domination over others.

The December 2022 law has given a powerful impetus to memory activists to engage in a “politics of visibility”, but the end of the political process is far in the future. While the ostensible aim of the legislation – to prevent the public promotion of authoritarian and totalitarian ideologies – is commendable, the means chosen to advance this goal will not necessarily be successful.

## Endnotes

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3. Saeima Press Service, "Saeima Suspends Bilateral Agreement between Latvia and Russia on Memorial Buildings and Monuments", in: *Latvijas Republikas Saeima*, 12.5.2022, <https://www.saeima.lv/en/news/saeima-news/31027-saeima-suspends-bilateral-agreement-between-latvia-and-russia-on-memorial-buildings-and-monuments> (last accessed 23.11.2023).
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6. "Lietuvos Respublikos draudimo propaguoti totalitarinius, autoritarinius režimus ir jų ideologijas įstatymas" [Law of the Republic of Lithuania on the Prohibition of Propagation of Totalitarian, Authoritarian Regimes and Their Ideologies], no. XIV-1679, 13.12.2022, Vilnius.
7. Jurga Bakaitė, "Soviet Collaborator or Lithuanian Literary Genius? Plans for a Monument Reopen Old Scars", in: *LRT.lt*, 26.7.2023, <https://www.lrt.lt/en/news-in-english/19/2043309/soviet-collaborator-or-lithuanian-literary-genius-plans-for-a-monument-reopen-old-scars> (last accessed 23.11.2023).
8. Liutaras Nekrošius, "Soviet Era Architecture and the Meaning it Holds for People of Lithuania", in: *Place, Meaning and Attachment*, eds. Dak Kopec and Anna-Marie Bliss, London 2020, p. 98.
9. The composition Mokslo jaunimas (Academic youth) was created by the sculptors Juozas Mikėnas and Juozas Kėdainis; Pramonė ir statyba (Industry and construction) by Napoleonas Petrušis and Bronius Vyšniauskas; Taikos sargyboje (Guarding peace) by Bronius Pundzius; and Žemės ūkis (Agriculture) by Bernardas Bučas and Petras Vaivada (see Rasa Baločkaitė, "The New Culture Wars in Lithuania: Trouble with Soviet Heritage", in: *Cultures of History Forum*, 12.4.2015, <https://www.cultures-of-history.uni-jena.de/debates/the-new-culture-wars-in-lithuania> (last accessed 23.11.2023); Rasa Čepaitienė, "The Ricochet of Leninopad and the De-Sovietization of Lithuanian Public Space", in: *Arei. Journal for Central and Eastern European History and Politics*, issue 1, 2023, pp. 54–77, here pp. 60–64).
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12. See Violeta Davoliūtė, "The Baltic Model of Civic-Patriotic History", in: *Journal of Genocide Research*, vol. 24, no. 2, 2022, pp. 264–275.
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14. According to Pettai, the laws in Hungary, Czechia, Slovakia, Poland and Latvia also mention communist crimes in implementing the Framework Decision. For more on these memory laws, see Eva-Clarita Pettai, "Protecting the Memory of Criminalizing Dissent: Memory Laws in Lithuania and Latvia", in: *Memory Laws and Historical Justice: The Politics of Criminalizing the Past*, eds. Elazar Barkan and Ariella Lang, London 2022, p. 173.
15. "Lietuvos Respublikos administracinių nusižengimų kodekso 524 straipsnio pakeitimo įstatymas" [Law amending Article 524 of the Code of Administrative Offenses of the Republic of Lithuania], no. XIV-1022, 19.4.2022.
16. "Lietuvos Respublikos baudžiamojo kodekso 95 straipsnio pakeitimo bei papildymo, kodekso papildymo 1702 straipsniu ir kodekso priedo papildymo įstatymas" [Law amending and supplementing Article 95 of the Criminal Code of the Republic of Lithuania, supplementing the Code with Article 1702 and supplementing the Annex to the Code], no. XI-901, 15.6.2010.
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## Abstract

The wave of anti-Soviet iconoclasm sweeping the Baltics has taken a somewhat unexpected turn in Lithuania towards a debate over the role played by writers and intellectuals during the Soviet occupation. A recently adopted law and associated political campaign to cleanse public spaces of the last remaining monuments associated with the USSR have collided with the plans of the Lithuanian Writers' Union to erect a new monument in Vilnius to Justinas Marcinkevičius, a Lithuanian writer during the 1960s–1980s, and a prominent leader of the popular movement against Soviet rule. During the first wave of anti-Soviet iconoclasm in the early 1990s, a compromise was reached over monuments to Soviet-era writers and artists, leaving them untouched, for future generations to decide. Today, this compromise is being revisited, along with the notion that writers and artists who continued their work during periods of foreign rule were engaged in a form of cultural resistance. The outcome of this collision, in some ways intergenerational, is not yet clear. Will the iconoclastic impulse be channelled to help society work through the legacy of collaboration and accommodation with both the Soviet and Nazi



occupational regimes? Or will it contribute to forgetting by erasing any and all reminders of this complex and difficult era?

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