



Lithuania: Stepping Westward (Postcommunist States and Nations)

Thomas Lane

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Lithuania restored her independence, after half a century of Soviet occupation, in the immediate aftermath of the failed Moscow coup in August 1991. As the multi-national Soviet state disintegrated, Lithuania evolved, without war or violence, from a communist state and a command economy to a liberal democracy, a free market, and a society guaranteeing human and minority rights. Lithuania therefore offers a notable example of peaceful transition, all the more impressive in the light of the bloody conflict elsewhere in the former Soviet Union of Yugoslavia, where the aspirations to independence of the constituent republics were either violently resisted or dissolved into inter-ethnic violence. Equally remarkable has been Lithuania's determination to 'return to Europe' after half a century of separation, even at the price of submerging its recently restored sovereign rights in the supranational European Union. The cost of membership in western economic and security organizations are judged to be worth paying to prevent Lithuania's being drawn once again into a putative Russian sphere of influence. On the threshold of a new millennium therefore, Lithuania has made a pragmatic accommodation to the demands of becoming a modern European state, whilst vigorously resisting the dilution of her rich cultural and historical traditions. These twin themes of accommodation and resistance are Lithuania's historical legacy to the current generations of Lithuanians as they integrate into European institutions and continue the modernization process.

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