

LITHUANIA'S CULTURAL POLICY: 1927–1940

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ABSTRACT *This article deals with the cultural policy of the authoritarian regime of Antanas Smetona between 1927 and 1940. Treating policy not only as a theoretical and ideological construction but also illustrating its practical implementation (regulation and control, including concrete management, the search for methods and means, the functioning of government institutions), the author investigates the government's attempts to influence the creative sphere and to reinforce trends acceptable to the authoritarian regime; the government's contribution to searches for national distinctiveness in Lithuanian culture and freedom of creation in an authoritarian state.*

It is maintained that the authoritarian regime endeavoured to control the entire life of the state, including culture. However, cultural policy as defined by specific directives was not developed. The authoritarian regime did not force artists to adhere to compulsory norms of creative activity, but internal censorship haunting artists testified to the authoritarian nature of the political regime. On the other hand, the moderate character of the authoritarian regime itself was attested by the absence of obvious imperative guidelines which could subordinate culture at any cost to the propaganda needs of the regime and fix the norms of creation compulsory for all artists.

Introduction Following the coup d'état of 17 December 1926, an authoritarian regime came to power in Lithuania. In the words of Algirdas Julius Greimas, Antanas Smetona became 'the almost absolute ruler of the country', while the purely Lithuanian revolution meant Lithuania's Lithuanization.¹ The coup not only brought an authoritarian regime, but also it established the domination of the Lithuanian ethnic community. Changes in social and political life did not bypass the sphere of culture – they entrenched the dominance of Lithuanian culture, which was proclaimed a guarantor of the existence of the national state. It is noteworthy that since the very

¹ A. J. Greimas, *Iš arti ir toli* (Vilnius, 1991), pp. 255–258.

rebirth of independent Lithuania the creation of national culture has been conceived as the strengthening of the political independence of the state, as a continuance of the struggle for it, considering that independence is achieved by political means and it is reinforced by national culture.

This article examines the state policy with regard to culture during the period of Smetona's authoritarian rule between the coup of 17 December 1926 and the occupation of Lithuania in 1940. Perceiving policy in both its theoretical and ideological construction and in practice (regulation and control of concrete management, the functioning of state institutions, and the search of methods and means), an attempt is made to shed light on the following questions: (1) endeavours to extend the influence of the government over creative spheres and to channel culture in a direction acceptable to and sponsored by the regime; (2) the scope of the contribution of the political regime in determining the search for ethnicity in Lithuanian culture, and (3) the degree of the freedom of creation in the authoritarian state. In this study of cultural policy education issues have been excluded deliberately as a sphere of concern taken for granted by any modern state; instead attention is focused on other fields, primarily on the creative sphere. It is hoped that this analysis of the cultural policy of the political regime might facilitate greatly the diagnosis of the regime itself.

Culture Management During the period between the declaration of independence and 1926 issues of culture and art were entrusted to the Ministry of Education, the main concern of which was the formation and implementation of the educational system. Consequently, problems of culture and art were dealt with only perfunctorily. Such a situation made the artists themselves use their initiative and take the organization and coordination of the cultural life into their own hands. In the spring of 1926 the Lithuanian Artists Union prepared a preliminary project of an arts council and presented it to the Christian Democrat government with a proposal to set up that council within the Ministry of Education; the council was intended to have power regarding artistic matters of art and had to act as an advisory organ at the Ministry of Education.² That time the Ministry rejected the proposal. However, soon after the election to the third

² Meno taryba (Meno kūrėjų draugijos parengtas projektas) [The Arts Council – a project for a Creative Artists Association], LCVA, f. 391, ap. 4, b. 1092, fo. 98.

Seimas, (8–10 May 1926) the new government agreed with the idea of setting-up an arts council. Mykolas Sleževičius' coalition government, consisting of Peasant Populists and Social Democrats and adhering to the policy of expanding democratic rights, maintained that the role of the government was central and decisive in the solution of political questions, while in cultural matters society had to assume overall responsibility. And it was the duty of the government to create the most favourable conditions for involving society in cultural activities and initiatives.³ Thus, the government welcomed all social cultural initiatives, and the Art Council was established as an advisory body of the Minister of Education to deal with all matters relating to art and artists and the formulation of state policy on culture.⁴ Nevertheless, the functioning of the council was short-lived: after the coup of 17 December the authoritarian regime did not need its services, and in the spring of 1927 its sessions were discontinued.⁵ The authoritarian regime was not in any need of a council which would remind the authorities of the cultural problems or even lay claim to the formation of such policy.

The idea of an arts council (under a different name – the arts commission) was revived by the Department of Culture of the Ministry of Education in 1934. The establishment of this department witnessed new tendencies in the management of culture – an effort to introduce stricter organization and a bias viewed as desirable by the political regime. The artists themselves greeted this official initiative in the hope of deriving a certain benefit from it – some improvement in the functioning of cultural institutions, greater encouragement and financing of creative initiatives. And it was little wonder, given that the state was the only real sponsor of art and culture, and the material circumstances of the artists were not easy. An indirect characteristic of the situation can be the absence of an art market in Lithuania at that time – through the entire period of inter-war independence not a single specialized shop of artworks was established in the country.⁶ The only buyer of art was the Mikalojus Konstatinas Čiurlionis Gallery, which considered the support of

³ 'Kultūros šventė', *Lietuva*, 5 Aug. 1926, p. 1.

⁴ Meno tarybos statutas, *Ivyriausybės žinios*, 10 Dec. 1926, p. 3.

⁵ F. Kirša, '10 metų nepriklausomybės sukaktuvės ir menas', *Pradai ir žygiai*, no. 1, 1927, p. 78.

⁶ J. Mulevičiūtė, *Modernizmo link. Dailės gyvenimas Lietuvos Respublikoje 1918–1940* (Kaunas, 2001), p. 46.

Lithuanian artists one of its principal aims. In practice this was achieved by buying works of art for this state-owned art gallery.⁷ Artists and writers, aware of the absence of governmental support and attention, envied art life in totalitarian states such as Italy and even the USSR, where attention given to art was much greater than at home.⁸ The French model of patronage was not popular in Lithuania.

Prizes and state-organized competitions could be treated as state support of the arts. However, according to *Literatūros naujienos*, they did not leave ‘any deeper imprint on the invidious material circumstances of the Lithuanian writer’.⁹ Naturally, the prizes could not solve the problems of artistic patronage, neither could writers make a living from their publications – the incomes were too small.¹⁰ The endeavours of the authorities to institutionalize creative activities coincided with the tendencies of the artists to organize themselves into unions in the expectation of having their interests better represented and obtaining more reliable state support. It should be noted that such hopes were kept alive by indefinite promises from the authorities. The first to unite were the writers, who established their union in 1932.

Although the artists themselves saw the necessity of uniting into creative organizations, the process was slow and protracted until 1934 when the authorities became involved in it. Encouraging the establishment of creative unions, the authorities treated them as institutions of social education, continuing the citizen’s national education, begun at school. Besides, the organization was to be the first step towards the formation of the artists’ corporation, envisaged by the authorities – it was no accident that the Lithuanian Writers Union was defined as a ‘corporation of writers’.¹¹

Thus, by 10 April 1935 decree of the Minister of Education, the Art Commission was revived ‘to discuss issues related to the fine

⁷ M.K. Čiurlionis Gallery and State Museum to the Ministry of Education, explanatory letter of 14 June 1926 to the 1927 estimate, *Lietuvių literatūros ir meno archyvas* (henceforth LLMA), Vilnius, f. 93, ap. 1, b. 15, fo. 179.

⁸ R. Kalpokas, ‘Skatinanti atmosfera meniniam veikimui pagyvinti’, *Lietuvos aidas*, 1 Aug. 1935, p. 6.

⁹ ‘Literatūros premijų paradas’, *Literatūros naujienos*, 1 March 1936, p. 1.

¹⁰ Board of the Lithuanian Writers Union to Prime Minister J. Tūbelis, letter of Nov. 1936, *Lietuvių literatūros ir tautosakos institutas* (henceforth LLTI), f. 13–2137, fo. 1.

¹¹ Antanas Juška, ‘Kultūrinio gyvenimo organizacija’, *Naujoji Romuva*, no. 12–13, 1935, p. 301.

arts, to confer on the measures and ways of improving the situation in the arts and to seek the opinion of artists on all matters connected with arts, which the Ministry may consider necessary'.¹² In actual fact, the Commission was assigned a different role, which it fulfilled successfully: the artists rallied behind it to set up the Lithuanian Artists Union.¹³ Following its establishment the previous Arts Commission of the Ministry of Education was dissolved.¹⁴ The Commission became redundant, since its functions were taken over by the new Union, which was to become the official institution, representing and uniting all Lithuanian artists. This Union was necessary for the Department of Culture merely as a tool to control the world of artists. Admittedly, the regime, though endeavouring to rally workers of creative spheres into unions, did not drive them by force as this was a case in the neighbouring totalitarian countries. Instead, attempts were made to introduce organizational structure and to have influence over the established unions. That this was the case is attested by the situation in the Lithuanian Journalists Union, which was headed by the ideologist of the Nationalist Union and chief supporter of the authoritarian regime, Izidorius Tamošaitis, between 1 December 1934 and 15 April 1939.¹⁵

The scenario of uniting artists was similar to that of another corporative institution – the establishment of the Chamber of Labour in 1934–1936.¹⁶ It must be added that certain groundwork had been done before the authorities set down to corporative activity. In May 1934 all trade unions were closed, thus 'creating conditions' to defend the professional interests only of those who were employed in organizations under government aegis, no matter whether such interests were raised by bricklayers or artists. The Lithuanian Artists Union was treated like a trades union – and that was the opinion of the artists themselves.¹⁷

¹² Decree of the Minister of Education K.D./ No. 16, 10 April 1935, LCVA, f. 377, ap. 1, b. 37, fo. 3.

¹³ Minutes no. 1 of the inaugural meeting of the Lithuanian Artists Union, 6 Oct. 1935, LLMA, f. 33, ap. 2, b. 2, ff. 3–4.

¹⁴ The Lithuanian Artists Union to the Minister of Education, letter of 26 Nov. 1935, LCVA, f. 391, ap. 4, b. 1483, fo. 229.

¹⁵ J. G. 'Iš žurnalistų sąjungos veiklos', *Lietuvos žurnalistų sąjungos metraštis, 1940 metai* (Kaunas, 1940), p. 85.

¹⁶ G. Rudis, 'Darbo rūmų vieta tautininkų socialinėje politikoje', *Lietuvos TSR Mokslų Akademijos darbai*, A serija, vol. 2, 1983.

¹⁷ The minutes of the general meeting of 28 Dec. 1935 of the Lithuanian Artists Union, LLMA, f. 33, b. 2, fo. 54.

The endeavours of the authorities to organize artists into creative unions were associated with the then popular idea of corporativism – Italy's corporative experience seemed attractive.¹⁸ In 1936 the Chamber of Labour was established as a corporate institution, and the former Chamber of Agriculture, Commerce, Industry and Handicrafts was re-organized.¹⁹ The 'trend' of setting-up corporations covered culture as well, and it manifested itself in the projects for the 'construction' of the Chamber of Culture.

In the autumn of 1938 the director of the Department of Culture Vytautas Soblyš stated that in Lithuania, where progress had been made in the creation of the chamber system, the establishment of a chamber of culture 'would mean the crowning of this system in Lithuania'. He hoped that the Chamber of Culture would become the organizer of the Lithuanian national culture and all cultural corporations would rally round. In his opinion, there could be independent corporations of literature, music, painting, theatre, the press and liberal professions; and they could serve the basis for the formation of those corporations. Meanwhile the existing professional organizations, such as the Writers Society, the Musicians Society and the Unions of Artists and Journalists would be asked to join corresponding corporations. The director of the Department of Culture argued that the establishment of corporations would be useful to their members, since they would be assured material wellbeing and a certain place in society and in the state; in their turn the members of the corporations would be under an obligation to serve the Lithuanian nation and state; and the Chamber of Culture would be concerned not only with the wellbeing of their corporations, but with national culture in general.²⁰

Though the planned establishment of the Chamber of Culture was not implemented, it nevertheless served the political regime well in blocking the project of setting up a culture foundation, which originated on a social initiative following the neighbours' example. In Latvia and Estonia cultural foundations were established as independent and stable financial sources to support the society's creative initiative and artistic activity and also to further the development of culture conducted by state institutions. The idea of establishing a

¹⁸ A. Maceina, 'Korporacinės idėjos aktualumas', *Naujoji Romuva*, no. 19, 1936, p. 289.

¹⁹ Rudis, 'Darbo rūmų vieta', p. 99.

²⁰ V. Soblyš, 'Kultūros rūmai', *Vairas*, no. 19, 1938, pp. 172–173.

cultural foundation, originating ‘from beneath’, clashed with the government’s policy to manage and regulate the creative initiative. Therefore the government prevented the set-up of the foundation and, in accordance with the idea of a corporate state, was going to establish a chamber of culture to control cultural and creative organizations.²¹ The state was not inclined to relinquish the most effective means of influencing the art world – state sponsoring. Thus, in 1938 the State Savings Bank earmarked 10,000 litai for the awards of art works. When the chairman of the Lithuanian Artists Union came to thank the manager of the Bank, the latter said that ‘the prize would be allocated in future as well depending on the conformable behaviour of the artists’.²²

Prior to 1934, i.e. before the appearance of the Department of Culture – an institution concerned with culture – the management of the issues of culture was dealt with only on an ad hoc basis. In the first years after the coup the state did care much of culture – there were more important matters. Nevertheless, the state was not indifferent to culture – it considered itself to be authorized to impose certain requirements on art: the artists, creating patriotic art and thus helping the state to foster the patriotic feelings of the citizens, had to serve the state.²³

Attention to cultural issues increased in 1934, when Juozas Tonkūnas became minister of education, and the appointment of the new minister was marked by the establishment of the Department of Culture. This department sought to take control of the whole cultural life. That entailed the adoption of a number of laws and decrees, regulating various spheres of cultural activities: the Law on Folklore Gathering, the Literary Awards Regulations and the Law on Bookshops (1935); the Laws on Public State Libraries and on the Vytautas the Great Museum (1936); the Rules supplementing the Law on Public State Libraries and the Statute of the Culture Museum of Vytautas the Great (1937); the Statute of the Antanas Smetona Institute of Lithuanian Studies (1938) and the Law on Theatre (1939).²⁴

²¹ D. Mačiulis, ‘Kultūros fondo kūrimo projektai Lietuvoje 1926–1940’, *Lituanistica*, no. 4, 2001, p. 61.

²² Lietuvos dailininkų sąjungos 1938 m. rusejo 20 d. biuletėnis Nr. 7, VUB RS, f. 109, s.v. 61, fo. 6.

²³ ‘Patriotizmo auklėjimo reikalas’, *Lietuvos aidas*, 11 March 1929, p. 1.

²⁴ *Vyriausybės žinios*, 1935–1939.

The objective of the Department of Culture to hold sway over the entire cultural life was difficult to implement: the Department lacked clear-cut guidelines in its work and the formation of cultural policy was not its strong point. The Ministry of Education continued to assert that state-management of the arts would be the best guarantee that it would 'remain sufficiently artistic and national'.²⁵ However, the bureaucratic apparatus was not competent enough to solve ideological issues and merely acted on instructions from above.

The Nationalist Union was not of much help either, despite the statement in its 1928 programme that the aim of the Union was 'national culture, developed in a free, independent and democratic Lithuania, governed by the rule of law'.²⁶ However, a more precise definition of national culture, indicating the directions and priorities of the activity, was not presented. In 1934 that was a stimulus for the Nationalist Union to plan an ideological institution, a kind of 'ministry of national propaganda'. Even several drafts were proposed (their authors drew their ideas from Nazi Germany) about the way such propaganda should be conducted.

All the drafts shared the proposition that cultural issues should be assigned to a specific ideological institution, which was to establish the limits of national culture and safeguard them with the help of censorship and thus ensure the trends acceptable to the regime.²⁷ In 1934 no propaganda department was set up, and instead the Department of Culture was established to perform the same functions. True, the Department did not become 'a helmsman of the cultural life' – the ideologist of national culture – as had been envisaged by the regime. Its activity lacked ideological resolve since the Department itself had no national ideology, which was conceived as a closed system of views, values and ideals, the entirety of which could 'serve as guidelines' in the formation of cultural policy.

The idea of establishing a ministry of propaganda was revived by the new cabinet, headed by Vladas Mironas and approved by Smetona on 24 March 1938. In that year the Public Works Administration (henceforth PWA) was established; it was headed by the Nationalist ideologist Professor Izidorius Tamošaitis.²⁸ The PWA

²⁵ K. Masiliūnas, 'Menas ir valstybė', *Vairas*, no. 23, 1939, pp. 410–413.

²⁶ *Lietuvių tautininkų sąjungos įstatai ir programa*, Kaunas, 1928, p. 8.

²⁷ The Main Issues Relating to the Structure of the Department of the Press and Information at the Cabinet (the project prepared by V. Kaupas in 1934) LCVA, f. 923, ap. 1, b. 1041, fo. 140.

²⁸ Bulletin of 20 April 1938, Nr. 522, LCVA, f. 923, ap. 1, b. 1013, fo. 43.

was to become an institution for the formation of the national ideology, the creation of which was still a goal to be achieved. Taking into account a moderate character of Smetona's authoritarian regime, it was not at all easy to offer a consistent ideology and to draw a strict line of ideological taboo. Besides, there existed a need for an ideological interpreter, competent of solving current ideological issues flexibly. High hopes were placed on the PWA, which was to become such an ideological interpreter, capable of combining theory with practice. The PWA promised to devote its attention to art, which 'is the most beautiful national flower of culture', and it is such when 'it is nurtured in the depths of the nation's soul and when it expresses the nation's soul and its aspirations profoundly, extensively and imaginatively'. Assurances were not spared in promising attention to social and cultural organizations in order 'to ensure they operate harmoniously and to the benefit of both nation and state'.²⁹

The PWA was short-lived – due to its unrestricted censorship activity and interference in all spheres of the cultural life it soon acquired a bad reputation.³⁰ The Nationalists themselves could not conceal their disappointment over the activities of the PWA. Nevertheless, despite criticism in the Nationalist press, there were no requirements to close the institution. Instead there were only proposals to reorganize it into a ministry of national culture to encompass all cultural spheres: the press, literature, theatre, arts, music, museums, public libraries, choirs, etc., and this would apparently lead to the appearance of the explicit guidelines, acceptable to the political regime.³¹

A ministry of national culture might have been established but for the changes in the government. The cabinet headed by Jonas Černius did away with the officious PWA to enhance its 'liberal' image. Simultaneously the hoped-for political guidelines for the cultural programme failed to materialize.

In Search of National Culture On the eve of Lithuania's independence political and national oppression seemed to be the chief obstacle to the creation of the nascent state's national culture. In actual fact, after the recovery of independence, this problem was not resolved and it became even more complicated. Lithuanian culture was faced with the issue of national identity, which in turn required

²⁹ Bulletin of Joint Undertaking, 25 August 1938, Nr. 576, LCVA, f. 923, ap. 1, b. 1014, fo. 132.

³⁰ Z. Ivinskis' Diary, LNMMB, f. 29, s.v. 14/2, fo. 160.

³¹ A. Daumantas, 'Kultūros politika', *Vairas*, no. 11, 1939, pp. 206–207.

a definition of cultural tradition. After the coup of 17 December 1926 this remained a burning issue, since Smetona's regime was oriented towards consolidating the elements of national identity.

In the 1930s interest in national traditions grew increasingly, or rather there was a heightened search for traditions, fostered by the endeavour to create a high culture of Lithuania's own. Independent Lithuania was being created taking into account the one-time ducal Lithuania. That was the proof of the ability of the Lithuanian ethnic group to manage a state on its own, drawing up on the spirit of the Lithuanian peasantry, which had preserved what was regarded as the most significant feature of nationality, namely language. These two sources of national tradition – the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and the Lithuanian ethno-cultural heritage – were side by side; their place, weight and interrelationship, however, were unstable and underwent permanent change together with society. The Grand Duchy's heroic past could be inspiring in the struggle for independence; meanwhile the independent Republic of Lithuania and the former Grand Duchy of Lithuania, according to Vytautas Kavolis, were too different both in scale and in problems for an authentic link to be made between them.³²

In the thirties when doubts arose over the suitability of the Grand Duchy for entrenching a new national identity (in Juozas Keliuotis' words 'the epoch of the grand dukes was too distant and too different from our times'³³), gazes were turned to ethno-cultural heritage in the countryside to provide steadier foundations. That, however, turned out to be too close to serve a basis for 'inventing' a centuries-old tradition. For a Lithuanian, who had just left his ramshackle hut, ethno-cultural heritage could not seem a relic of the glorious past, it was rather a reminder of his poverty, something to get rid of, and not a value to be treasured zealously. On balance, although the 'moss-covered hut' was not attractive, it was a clear and direct allusion to one's cultural originality and ethnic heritage (according to Jonas Aistis: 'The countryside tradition is old. It is old Lithuanian'³⁴) and one had only to find a way of combining modernity with nationality. Besides, the linking of the present and the past as an uninterrupted historical process was complicated by the discord with history – the idea in the social historical conscience that

³² V. Kavolis, *Žmogus istorijoje* (Vilnius, 1994), p. 267.

³³ J. Keliuotis, 'Politikos etika', *Naujoji Romuva*, no. 12, 1931, p. 273.

³⁴ J. Aistis, *Dievai ir smūkeliai. Apie laiką ir žmones. Milfordo gatvės elegijos* (Vilnius, 1991), p. 202.

after the Union of Lublin Lithuania somehow had ceased to exist. Therefore attempts were made to replace national history with national tradition, which embraced the ideas of statehood and ethnicity. The practice of avoiding consecutive presentation of the past facilitated creating connection of the ethno-cultural heritage of yesterday's countryside with the archaeological legacy, thus presenting an appearance of a successive development of the Lithuanian culture and offering a vision of the agelessness of national culture. The tradition of nursing one's national pride was pertinent to the political regime based on nationalistic ideology. On the other hand it was a serious obstacle for the formation of the protection of the cultural heritage, since it conditioned a selective attitude towards the cultural heritage, treating it as necessary only in so far as it served the basis to validate the national tradition. The ethno-cultural and archaeological heritage was sufficient for that purpose.

The selective attitude of the government to the cultural heritage was revealed most clearly in its treatment of the cultural heritage of manorial estates. The authorities neither encouraged nor prevented the destruction of a heritage which seemed alien to society. No attempts were made to form a more favourable attitude to it; in general this cultural heritage was ignored.³⁵

In 1933 the ideologist of the Nationalist cultural policy Vytautas Alantas, having resigned himself to the idea that national culture could not emerge so quickly, considered 'laying the foundation stone to the growing culture' the most important task of his generation.³⁶ In his view that cornerstone could be an authentic nationality, linked to the history of the nation, its ethno-cultural heritage and, understandably, the Lithuanian language. Naturally a more serious scholarly viewpoint on cultural heritage and national history was considered indispensable. The intention to define nationality and to lay the foundation for the nascent national culture induced the Ministry of Education to organize scholarly Lithuanian studies and set up the Antanas Smetona Institute of Lithuanian Studies in 1938.³⁷

³⁵ Mačiulis, 'Dvarų kultūrinio palikimo likimas Nepriklausomoje Lietuvoje', *Kultūros paminklai*, 9 (2002), pp. 57–58.

³⁶ V. Alantas, 'Reikia kultūrinės revoliucijos', *Tautos mokykla*, no. 20, 1933, p. 358.

³⁷ Mačiulis, 'Antano Smetonos lituanistikos instituto įkūrimas', *Lituanistica*, no. 2, 2002, pp. 34–35.

In answer to what independent Lithuania achieved, Algirdas Julius Greimas stated that its greatest achievement was the nation's passing of the maturity test – the Lithuanian became aware that he was neither a Pole nor a Belarusian, he was a Lithuanian.³⁸ It was namely then that a purely Lithuanian revolution – Lithuania's Lithuanization – took place.³⁹ Shortly after the coup of 17 December 1926 the official newspaper *Lietuva* wrote that after many years of political oppression the Lithuanian nation lagged behind its neighbours; and a significant part of it became impoverished both materially and spiritually by surrendering themselves to the foreign influences.⁴⁰ The authoritarian regime proposed the most powerful weapon to reduce foreign influences: 'At everything that is alien look with the greatest distrust; take anything alien only in case of necessity; having let in a guest, don't let him feel a master in your home; don't open your heart and soul to him' since 'a foreign commodity and a strange custom, accepted with open arms, are the most dangerous and powerful weapons of your enemy'.⁴¹

In the formation of national culture, the removal of foreign influences was considered the key to success. This condition was also regarded as vital by the editor Keliuotis of *Naujoji Romuva*, the most influential and fundamental journal in independent Lithuania; its publication was initiated in the Catholic circles in 1931. *Naujoji Romuva*, or rather the Catholic intellectuals around it, formed the discourse of national culture, which the regime accepted almost in its entirety, without supplementing it and only eliminating one or another unacceptable idea. From the very start the movement presented itself as a champion of 'cultural independence' and proclaimed that after winning the political freedom it was time to get rid of foreign patronage, because reliance on non-Lithuanians or foreigners as leaders of the cultural life 'humiliates the nation, damages its reputation and seeks to prove that we are creatively impotent'.⁴² *Naujoji Romuva* argued that foreign influences were intent upon stifling the genuine Lithuanian spirit and called for a drastic action against this phenomenon.⁴³

³⁸ Greimas, *Iš arti ir toli*, p. 321.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 258.

⁴⁰ 'Naujus metus pradedant', *Lietuva*, 3 Jan. 1927, p. 1.

⁴¹ 'Kultūros kaina', *Lietuvos aidas*, 13 March 1933, p. 4.

⁴² Keliuotis, 'Konstruktyvinės kritikos kelias', *Naujoji Romuva*, no. 114, 1933, p. 217.

⁴³ "'Naujosios Romuvos' 200 Nr. minėjimas', *ibid.*, no. 201, 1934, p. 808.

Naujoji Romuva did not lack suspicion on its pages with respect to foreigners. Presenting the ideas and tasks of the journal in his lectures to the public during his trips Keliuotis asserted that the foreigners undermined Lithuanian self-confidence and destroyed the nation's consolidation.⁴⁴ He maintained that foreigners, having occupied influential positions in the theatre, university, commerce, medicine, and advocacy 'want to smother us from within'.⁴⁵ Keliuotis did not insist on fencing off completely from the foreigners, nevertheless, he was quite confident that national culture could be created only on one's own, since a foreigner who came 'to help us' brought 'his spirit, alien to us'.⁴⁶ Therefore national minorities were to be tolerated only in as much as they did not block up the elite of Lithuanian orientation to have the lead in all spheres of life.⁴⁷ It is no wonder that practically there were no direct anti-Semitic statements by persons from *Naujoji Romuva* milieu. In their opinion, the closed autonomous Jewish culture did not cause any danger to the purity of the Lithuanian national culture.

Sympathizing with other nations' striving to become modern states, Keliuotis asserted that Lithuania, too, 'had to be national, in essence' and that the cooperation between the nation and the state had to be particularly close, harmonious and effective, since 'nationalism was Lithuania's greatest support' and 'the Lithuanian state was impossible without Lithuanianness'.⁴⁸ In the campaign for the national state there originated the appeals: Lithuania for the Lithuanians. 'Let's rely on ourselves and our compatriots. Let's rally all Lithuanian creative forces to reveal and realize the genius of our nation'.⁴⁹ At that time *Lietuvos Aidas* rejoiced to see that 'the slogans for the positions of national culture were receiving a growing response among enlightened people' – the newspaper referred to that process as 'a crucial breakthrough' in the spiritual life of the nation.⁵⁰

⁴⁴ Keliuotis, Ideas and Tasks of *Naujoji Romuva* (a plan of the lecture for the public of Rokiškis 1932–1933 m.), LNMMB, f. 31, s.v. 143, fo. 7.

⁴⁵ Keliuotis, Ideas and Tasks of *Naujoji Romuva* (a plan of the lecture for the public of Skuodas 1932–1933 m.), LNMMB, f. 31, s.v. 143, fos. 1–2.

⁴⁶ Keliuotis, 'Konstruktyvinės kritikos kelias', p. 218.

⁴⁷ Keliuotis, 'Penkiolika laisvo gyvenimo metų', *Naujoji Romuva*, no. 111, 1933, p. 145.

⁴⁸ Keliuotis, *Visuomenės idealas* (Kaunas, 1935), p. 106.

⁴⁹ Keliuotis, 'Jaunosios Lietuvos gairės Dariui ir Girėnui žuvus', *Naujoji Romuva*, no. 134, 1933, p. 626.

⁵⁰ Alantas, 'Mūsų teatro kelias', *Lietuvos aidas*, 8 July 1933, p. 7.

Unequivocal was the following statement of Maceina:

The minorities are always a foreign body in a national state; they never identify themselves with the body of the nation and become part of its organism. Therefore, *in our time the boundaries of the state must coincide with those of the nation* (original emphasis); while foreigners residing within the nation must either be assimilated into the culture of the nation to the point of loss of their own ethnic identity or be resettled into their own state or leave as guests.⁵¹

In respect to nationalist statements *Naujoji Romuva* did not display any great originality apart from radicalism, which again was exquisitely camouflaged by intellectual rhetoric. Nationalist radicalism was presented by the journal as a generation gap between the parents who did not and possibly would not get rid of the habit of glancing to the East and the children who shared no sentiments for the East, relied only on themselves and had a liking only for the West.

In 1933 Keliuotis assured that the generation conflict would grow in Lithuania⁵² and he understood it as a struggle against foreign influences. In 1933 Petras Babickas proposed not to tolerate Lithuanians whose children were addressed by their nannies in German⁵³, while in 1939 A. Tarulis already requested that a law should be adopted envisaging that all cultural enterprises, serving Lithuanian culture be in the hands of the Lithuanians.⁵⁴ Besides, the Nationalists also expressed a wish that only ‘people of Lithuanian origin’ would be engaged in the work related to national culture. In a certain sense they would be recognized as ‘a kind of racists’, which, however ‘would differ radically from the Hitlerite or scientifically disposed racists’, since in the activity of Lithuanian culture the Lithuanian Nationalists only ‘instinctively adhered to pure Lithuanianness’ for fear that ‘an outsider, having not quite understood us, in particular if he happened to be extremely influential, would not distract us, albeit unconsciously, from the selected track’.⁵⁵

According to Kavolis, in independent Lithuania the sphere of the cultural interest narrowed from the relationship of the individual with the universe to the relation between Western civilization and the

⁵¹ Maceina, ‘Tauta ir valstybė’, *Naujoji Romuva*, no. 11, 1939, pp. 229–320.

⁵² ‘Senieji ir jaunieji’, *ibid.*, no. 147, 1933, p. 860.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ A. Tarulis, ‘Lietuvių kultūrai saugoti įstatymas’, *ibid.*, no. 49, 1939, p. 909.

⁵⁵ ‘Tautiškumas ir nacionalizmas’, *Lietuvos aidas*, 22 Nov. 1932, p. 1–2.

Lithuanian folk culture.⁵⁶ Meanwhile *Romuva* circles were concerned with the West only in as much as it could be of use in the formation of national culture. Besides, the West did not seem particularly attractive to the ideologists of national culture. In their view, the Western world, pervaded by philistinism, was far removed from the ideal model of the world, existing in their imagination, and that promoted cultural self-isolation. On the other hand, the West was found attractive due to its cultural Christian tradition and civilization achievements. In this ambiguous situation the supporters of *Romuva* found the following outcome: to take the West into consideration only when it was essential to adopt civilization achievements.⁵⁷ Therefore the openness to the West was demonstrated only in so far as was it necessary for the implementation of *Romuva* programme of Lithuania's modernization. And it also did not preclude Maceina from naming modern Western civilization as the chief enemy in his works on social philosophy.⁵⁸

Smetona did not seem to have a liking for the radical ideas of *Naujoji Romuva* – he spoke up for ‘human nationalism’ and maintained that there was no ‘contradiction between the old and the young’.⁵⁹ At the same time he was fully aware that national culture, based on the monopoly of Lithuanianness, could be created and established only by the young generation, which did not accept foreign cultures and was unequivocally in favour of a national state. Therefore he tacitly endorsed their ideas and was ready to justify their actions.⁶⁰ Well-timed and helpful was the radical position of the young in the defence of the purity of national culture as well as their reproach to the regime, creating a national state and accomplishing Lithuanian hegemony, for the situation that the highest positions in the field of culture were held by the people of ‘another’ ideology.⁶¹ The young generation had declared on many occasions its determination to implement still more decisively the programme proposed by Smetona himself: ‘To revive everything that is one's own, and to renounce and reject everything that is alien’.⁶² Besides, Smetona's

⁵⁶ Kavolis, *Žmogus istorijoje*, p. 152.

⁵⁷ Keliuotis, ‘Konstruktyvinės kritikos kelis’, *ibid.*, p. 219.

⁵⁸ L. Donskis, *Tarp Karlailio ir Klaipėdos* (Klaipėda, 1997), p. 215.

⁵⁹ Smetona, *Pasakyta parašyta*, vol. 2 (Boston-New York, 1974), p. 235.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 241.

⁶¹ Keliuotis, ‘Konstruktyvinės kritikos kelis’, *ibid.*, p. 218.

⁶² Smetona, *Pasakyta parašyta*, vol. 2, p. 213.

speech containing this idea was published in *Naujoji Romuva*. It must be added that by defending the purity of national culture and resolutely opposing foreign influences, the authorities often found themselves in a tricky situation as a consequence of international diplomacy. That is illustrated by the story of the Lithuanian Society for the Acquaintance with the Culture of the USSR Nations. Although the regime was not at all in raptures about Soviet culture, it helped the Society to survive when doubts arose about its further *raison d'être*.⁶³ Meanwhile *Naujoji Romuva* was not under any obligation to international politics and could more freely express what the regime thought, but could not say in public.

The stance taken by *Romuva* supporters, who were familiar with the Western world, towards nationalism should not come as a surprise – after all, A. D. Smith has observed that nationalism was a programme of the people, who experienced the influence of modern, secular, and in particular, Western culture and scholarship.⁶⁴ The contacts of the national intelligentsia with the West called forth a desire to raise the cultural level of the nation to that of the West; and the idea of the national state originated and was implemented as a project of modern Lithuanian culture. It was believed that the programme of modernizing national culture would be successfully realized and negative consequences would be avoided if that task was entrusted to the representatives of the dominant ethnic community, which, in its turn, encouraged a negative attitude to non-Lithuanians and to the West, and led to cultural self-isolation.

The Authoritarian Regime and Creative Freedom After the coup of 17 December 1926 the new political regime adhered to the opinion that the objective of art was ‘to stimulate noble feelings in the nation’ and to draw it to ‘lofty deeds’⁶⁵ and regretted that ‘with few exceptions art does not intend to contribute to the education of patriotism’.⁶⁶ It was the conviction of the authorities that all artists could not forget that they were members of their nation and that they had to do their duty not only for their Muse but also for their nation.⁶⁷

⁶³ The Minutes of 22 May 1937 of the General Meeting of Lithuanian Society for the Acquaintance with the Culture of the USSR Nations, LNMMB, f. 9, s.v. 237, fo. 3.

⁶⁴ Cited from the 1994 Vilnius translation: *Nacionalizmas XX amžiuje*, p. 39.

⁶⁵ ‘Tautos dvasios kūryba’, *Lietuvos aidas*, 1 March 1929, p. 1.

⁶⁶ ‘Patriotizmo auklėjimo reikalas’, *ibid.*, 11 March 1929, p. 1.

⁶⁷ ‘Skundai dėl kultūros – ar kova’, *ibid.*, 24 April 1934, p. 4.

The artists and cultural institutions were often reminded of their duty to the nation, and the theatre was possibly the most frequent addressee of such admonitions. On the occasion of the celebration of the tenth anniversary of the National Theatre, the official newspaper wrote: 'doing credit to the state it must be said that the authorities have not put any bridle either on theatre or on any other high cultural values and have no intentions of doing that'. At the same time an allusion was made that the theatre could exist only going hand in hand with the state and properly repaying the state and nation for the support.⁶⁸ Although the regime claimed that it was not going 'to put a bridle' on the artists, it did try to steer the course of art in 'the national direction' and remind the artists of their duty to the state and nation and to condemn those who 'in the name of unknown cultural ideals emphatically disclaimed all responsibility for the state and its interests'.⁶⁹

Art must serve the nation – a thesis, which was unquestionable in the totalitarian states – was proclaimed by Smetona not quite categorically and somehow indecisively: 'Art is not only for art's sake, but for the nation and even more for the nation'. He interpreted such a 'hesitant' decision as follows: 'Art is a magnificent factor in the nation's life, in particular in the life of our nation, which is not yet fully reborn ... Art is crucial in inspiring and animating national consciousness'.⁷⁰ Smetona's position as dictator enabled him to speak in ambiguities, especially as there were people who were ready to interpret them 'correctly'. Thus, Aleksandras Merkelis argued that in Smetona's opinion the statement that art and science were an end in itself was true only to a certain extent: 'In general, both art and science must be useful practically, they must serve the nation, in other words, come to its aid wherever it might be necessary and honestly serve even the needs of politics'.⁷¹

Smetona, however, did not propose any conception of cultural policy and seemed not to have tried to do that – instead the Nationalist ideologist of cultural policy Vytautas Alantas did that. He not only gathered the ideas of the dictator into a consistent structure

⁶⁸ 'Teatro šventė', *ibid.*, 3 Jan. 1931, pp. 1–2.

⁶⁹ 'Kultūros darbas ir politika', *ibid.*, 13 July 1929, p. 1.

⁷⁰ Smetona, *Pasakyta parašyta*, vol. 2, p. 313.

⁷¹ A. Merkelis, *Antano Smetonos tautinės ideologijos bruožai* (Kaunas, 1937), p. 30.

as far as possible but also attempted to present his own more coherent vision of the formation of national culture. True, Alantas' programme was both concrete and radical. Maintaining that the existential basis of the state was culture, he argued that the state had a right to interfere even in the private life of the individuals if that was in the interests of the public.⁷² Although he imagined the ideal Lithuania as 'a volunteer camp of cultural labour', he argued that those who were able but not willing to participate in the cultural movement should be 'encouraged persuasively in one way or another'.⁷³ This idea was also acceptable to the leaders of the Department of Cultural Affairs, who considered that the state could organize compulsory attendances at the theatre, concerts and lectures.⁷⁴

It was then a small step from the coercion of national culturalization to the restriction of creative freedom, delimiting the boundaries of national culture and defining the ideological taboo. Everything depended upon the will of the authoritarian regime. If the radical Nationalists had assumed power, Jonas Aistis, as a creator reflecting on the Lithuania of Smetona's day, would not have written: 'there was freedom galore for me'.⁷⁵ The 'concern' of the regime for the artists can be accounted for by the most peculiar feature of Smetona's rule – the misuse of unlimited power was practiced only in as much as it was necessary for the maintenance of one's positions. Merkelis maintained that the Nationalist government interfered little in the management of cultural affairs: 'Economic life was more or less regulated and controlled by the government, while cultural life was liberal and guided by the principle *laissez faire, laissez passer*'.⁷⁶ However, one could agree with Merkelis' idea only with reservations, since the authoritarian regime did make attempts to subordinate both art and literature for its interests, albeit inertly – inertia was characteristic of the regime.

Doubts can be cast on the complete liberalism of the cultural life taking into consideration a mere fact of the existence of censor-

⁷² V. Alantas, *Žygiuojanti tauta* (Kaunas, 1940), p. 30.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ A. Juška, 'Kultūrinio gyvenimo organizacija', *Naujoji Romuva*, no. 12–13, 1935, p. 302.

⁷⁵ Aistis, *Apie laiką ir žmones* (Chicago, 1954), p. 72.

⁷⁶ Merkelis, *Antanas Smetona. Jo visuomeninė, kultūrinė ir politinė veikla* (New York, 1964), p. 465.

ship. Independent Lithuania lived without censorship only for a short period. After the coup of 17 December 1926 it was re-introduced again and was more painstaking. The Ministry of Defence was entrusted with press censorship, which was determined not only to guard military secrets but also to prevent any public doubts about the legality of the regime.

The government formed after the coup denied that it was an adherent of strict press censorship, still less of complete censorship;⁷⁷ which, nevertheless, was not eased. On the contrary, it became heavier. This tendency could be illustrated not by the imposition of new laws but by the growing indefiniteness of censorial prohibitions, which enabled the regime to treat any regulation freely and thus extend the scope of undesirable information.

According to the Law on the Press, adopted in November 1935, censorship was taken over by the chief executives of the counties,⁷⁸ but censoring was not relaxed.⁷⁹ The transfer of censorship from the Ministry of Defence to the chief executives of the counties – from a military to a civilian institution – did not bring about any liberalization of censorship. In this way the government attempted to cover its endeavour to take the control of the press and other mass media into its hands. This was clearly visible in the new Law on the Press. The fact that censorship was not mentioned in the Law did not mean that monitoring disappeared or eased. The Law simply legitimated an indefinite (and at the same time stricter) control ‘taking into consideration the security or other matters of the state or nation’, which entitled the Minister of the Interior or the chief executive of the county to prohibit the dissemination of publications or to confiscate them.⁸⁰ Censorship became harsher also due to the fact that the new Law had no clause on preliminary supervision; instead only the censoring of printed publications was introduced. That made the publishers be more cautious with the publication of some books for fear of having to deal with censorship and incurring financial losses.⁸¹ However, one must agree with Liudas Truika that Article 33 of the Law was the

⁷⁷ ‘Spaudos laisvė ir cenzūra’, *Lietuvos aidas*, 16 Oct. 1928, p. 1.

⁷⁸ Spaudos įstatymas, *Vyriausybės Žinios*, no. 510, 1935.

⁷⁹ L. Truska, *Antanas Smetona ir jo laikai* (Vilnius, 1996), p. 258.

⁸⁰ Spaudos įstatymas, *Vyriausybės Žinios*, no. 510, 1935, p. 2.

⁸¹ Julius Butėnas to Vincas Žilionis, undated letter, LLTI, f. 1, s. v. 4330.

most stringent,⁸² according to which the editor of any newspaper or magazine could be required ‘to publish an article or some other message, which the Prime Minister or his lawyer deemed it necessary in the interests of the state/nation security or any other considerations’. Besides, the government had a right to indicate the editors where to place the article in the newspaper and in what print size.⁸³ The Catholic press asked more than once to be excused from publishing obligatory political articles, but these requests were unsuccessful.⁸⁴ The attempts to evade publishing enforced information usually ended in failure for the publisher.⁸⁵

Press censorship also strictly controlled publications imported from abroad and spreading the ideas of various religious sects, Communism, National Socialism, irrespectively of the language.

Censorship was intolerant to any criticism of the regime and did not bypass even the Nationalist press, when it critically touched upon the government’s policy.⁸⁶ Censorship was not merely indifferent to the critical attitudes towards the government, it also fought against books, which ‘by their frivolous criminal contents negatively influenced the students’ and ‘destroyed the dignity of Lithuanian literature and hindered the creativity of true writers’.⁸⁷ Such a decision was taken on the confiscation and destruction of the adventure novel *Mirusiuju laivas* [Das Totenschiff] by B. Traven, issued by the Teachers Bookshop.⁸⁸

Although the authoritarian regime was intent on controlling culture and creative activity, its attempts were not in fact resolute and decisive. Admittedly, not everybody in the ruling circles was satisfied with censorial indecision.⁸⁹ The attitude of the authoritarian regime towards creative circles was moderate and restrained: the establishment of obligatory norms for the creative world was not

⁸² L. Truska, *Antanas Smetona*, p. 259.

⁸³ Spaudos įstatymas, *Vyriausybės Žinios*, no. 510, 1935, p. 3.

⁸⁴ Truska, *Antanas Smetona*, p. 260.

⁸⁵ Head of the Press Department of Kaunas County to Minister of the Interior, report of 20 July 1936, LCVA, f. 402, ap. 2, b. 96, fo. 93; Interior Minister’s decree of 27 July 1936, LCVA, f. 402, ap. 2, b. 96, fo. 95.

⁸⁶ Truska, *Antanas Smetona*, p. 262.

⁸⁷ Public Works Administration to Minister of the Interior, letter of 20 March 1939, LCVA, f. 377, ap. 10, b. 303, fo. 30.

⁸⁸ Interior Minister’s decree of 25 Jan. 1940, LCVA, f. 402, ap. 2, b. 141, fo. 5.

⁸⁹ Minister of Defence and Commander of the Armed Forces to Minister of the Interior, letter 28 Febr. 1938, LCVA, f. 923, ap. 12, b. 1021, fos. 439–443.

implemented under compulsion. Nevertheless, attempts to regulate creation bore witness to the non-democratic nature of the political regime; and that promoted the rise of internal creative self-censorship. The presence of censorship was vital for the artists, especially when they were dealing with social problems or critical issues in their work.⁹⁰

Conclusions The authoritarian regime of Antanas Smetona that followed the coup of 17 December 1926 did not intend to share power with anybody and strove to control the entire life of the country, including the sphere of culture. The Ministry of Education which oversaw culture, did not become ‘the helmsman of cultural life’, it lacked political ideology in the sense of a closed aggregate of attitudes, values and ideals, which could serve as guidelines in forming cultural policy; accordingly specific cultural directives were not developed.

The authoritarian regime was oriented towards entrenching national principles and considered that the search for national identity should concentrate on ethno-cultural heritage as an undoubtable and unquestionable value. Attention to ethno-cultural heritage was the surest way to foster national and cultural singularity, while the removal of foreign influences was considered the principal precondition for achieving this. Therefore the tough stance taken by the members of the *Romuva* organization, who were ready to fight hard against the influences of foreign culture and defend the purity of national culture, was timely and ready at hand for the regime that did its best to entrench the domination of the Lithuanian ethno-cultural community, despite the fact that this stance furthered a suspicious treatment of non-Lithuanians and the West and led to cultural self-isolation.

The authoritarian regime did not abuse artists by establishing creation norms obligatory for everybody. However, the fact that the regime interfered little in the creative process and that artists did not complain of the absence of creative freedom did not mean that the regime did not try to control the artist world and did not influence art. The existence of censorship and the internal censorship haunting artists revealed the authoritarian nature of the political regime. On balance, the moderate nature of this very regime is attested by the

⁹⁰ Žilionis to Petras Cvirka, letter of 20 Febr. 1937, LLTI, f.1, s. v. 5156; Žilionis to Butėnas, letter of 26 Oct. 1937, LLTI, f.4, s. v. 1320.

fact that its cultural policy did not acquire any obvious directive character, did not seek at any cost to subordinate culture for its propaganda purposes and did not establish obligatory norms of creation for all artists.

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LIETUVOS VALSTYBĖS KULTŪROS POLITIKA 1927–1940 METAIS

Santrauka

DANGIRAS MAČIULIS

Straipsnyje nagrinėjama A. Smetonos autoritarinio režimo kultūros politika 1927–1940 metais. Politika laikant ne tik teorinį-ideologinį politikos konstravimą, bet ir praktinę politikos formą (reguliuojančią ir kontroliuojančią veiklą, apimančią konkretų vadovavimą, valdžios įstaigų funkcionavimą, metodų ir priemonių paiešką), ieškoma atsakymų į tokius klausimus: ar siekta išplėsti valdžios įtaką kūrėjų pasauliui ir suteikti kultūrai politinio režimo pageidaujama (jį remianti) kryptingumą, koks politinio režimo indėlis determinuojant tautiškumo paieškas lietuvių kultūroje, ar būta kūrybinės laisvės autoritarinėje valstybėje.

Teigiama, kad autoritarinis režimas siekė kontroliuoti visą valstybės gyvenimą, nedarydamas išimties kultūrai, tačiau konkrečių direktyvų pavidalu išreikšta kultūros politika neatsirado. Autoritarinis režimas neprievartavo menininkų nustatydamas visiems privalomas kūrybinio gyvenimo normas, tačiau cenzūros egzistavimas ir kūrėjus neapleidžianti vidinė cenzūra liudijo autoritarinį politinio režimo pobūdį. Kita vertus, tai, jog autoritarinio režimo kultūros politika neįgavo aiškaus direktyvinio pobūdžio, pasireiškiančio siekiu bet kokia kaina pajungti kultūrą politinio režimo propagandiniams tikslams ir visiems menininkams nustatyti privalomas kūrybinio gyvenimo normas, liudija nuosaikų paties autoritarinio režimo pobūdį.