

OUR COMMENTARY

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The New Year in the Baltics has ushered in dozens of novelties for all. The keenest observers counted nearly a hundred changes in the three Baltic state taxation, education, health, salary and pension systems and other fields. The Baltic Times reporters attempted to zero in on only those that will affect the daily lives of Estonians, Lithuanians and Latvians the most.

Smoke detectors offered

“Would you like to add a smoke detector to your purchase?” Don’t be surprised to hear this question in Latvian supermarkets in 2020. Starting January 1, every apartment in the country must be equipped with a smoke alarm and every private home must have a fire-extinguisher on top of that, as per the renewed Fire Safety Rules. These devices became one of the best-selling products at the end of 2019, reports 220.lv, one of the largest online stores in Latvia. Although the authorities have promised not to perform checks, people are eager to comply with the new regulations. Other changes implemented in the beginning of the new decade in Latvia include a 3.3% increase in gasoline tax, higher salaries for teachers and doctors, reduction of unemployment benefits, and some other differences.

Salaries, pensions and taxes

This year teachers, cultural workers and doctors in Latvia are expect-

Year 2020 ushered in a slew of novelties for all Balts



ed to receive a raise. A base salary of a school teacher grows from 710 euros to 750 euros a month starting in January 2020, and is supposed to grow by another 40 euros starting in September. In the healthcare sector, medical residents will receive a 20% raise while salaries of other medical workers will grow by 10%, according to the Ministry of Health. This

decision has been made after mass protests of healthcare practitioners in November 2019.

An average doctor salary before tax was 1839 euros in 2018, reports State Revenue Service. The salary of an average cultural worker will grow from 780 euros to 910 euros, a 16% increase.

Non-taxable minimum goes up

The non-taxable minimum which is applied to salaries below 1200 euros per month has grown from 230 to 300 euros — this change will affect 52% of Latvian workers, forecasts the Cabinet of Ministers, but people making under 600 euros per month will benefit the most.

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Latvia makes progress in tackling money laundering

TBT Staff

Latvia has made progress in strengthening its framework to tackle money laundering and terrorist financing, finds the first enhanced follow-up report, published on January 22 by the Committee of Experts on the Evaluation of Anti-money Laundering Measures and the Financing of Terrorism (MONEYVAL).

MONEYVAL decided that Latvia will remain in enhanced follow-up process and will continue to report back on further progress to strengthen its implementation of AML/CFT measures.

As a result of Latvia's progress in strengthening its framework to tackle money laundering and terrorist financing since its mutual evaluation report in July 2018, MONEYVAL has re-rated the country on ten Rec-



ommendations originally rated as “partially compliant” and one Recommendation originally rated as “largely compliant”.

Latvia was placed in an enhanced follow-up process, follow-

ing the adoption of its mutual evaluation report, which assessed the effectiveness of Latvia's anti-money laundering and counter-terrorist financing (AML/CFT) measures and their compliance with the Recom-

mendations by the Financial Action Task Force (FATF).

In line with MONEYVAL's rules of procedure, country has reported back on the progress it has made to strengthen its AML/CFT framework.

This follow-up report analyses Latvia's progress in addressing the technical compliance deficiencies identified in the mutual evaluation report.

Reflecting this progress, MONEYVAL has re-rated Latvia on Recommendations 6 (targeted financial sanctions related to terrorism and terrorist financing), 7 (targeted financial sanctions related to proliferation), 8 (non-profit organisations), 10 (customer due diligence), 22 (DNFBPs: customer due diligence), 26 (regulation and supervision of financial institutions),

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When busy, the weather outside the window matters little

Linas JEJEVICIUS
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There is still no snow and cold in the Baltics by the very end of January, which, for me, is a clear sign of climate change across the globe and in the Baltics, too.

Personally, I do not miss snow although the glittering of the dim street light-lit snow ridges I used to marvel at in my childhood is still vivid in my memories.

Here at The Baltic Times we've been quite busy for the last couple of months and certainly not very much concerned about what is going outside our windows – our winter edition of The Baltic Times Magazine has been rolled off the printing belt, packed nicely and is already making its way across the Baltics to local airports, embassies, trade missions, commerce chambers, libraries, SPAs, luxury hotels, restaurants and cafés.

I hope you will be among the lucky ones to stumble upon the glossy publication in any of the mentioned spots or you will perhaps find it in somewhere else. All the subscribers of The Baltic Times will receive it, free of charge, too.

Meanwhile, The Baltic Times newspaper is continuing its journey to our readers in the Baltics and beyond. Aware of many changes that are in place from January 1 are affecting daily life of every Baltic citizen, our reporters are introducing you to the New Year's novelties in Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia in the cover article.

I really recommend reading the interview by our young contributor in Vilnius with former Lithuanian President Valdas Adamkus, who reflects on the years gone by as a top US environmentalist and the head-of-state.

We also noticed, while stacking up the newspaper issue, that Latvia's long troubled banking sector has made progress in tackling money laundering and terrorist financing.

If you frequent the Baltics, you must have noticed the new hotels popping up in the Baltic capitals, in the second-largest, and in some cases, in the third-largest cities. We asked Gerhard Erasmus, CEO of Apex Alliance Hotel Management managing several international brands in the Baltics to share his insights on the expansion of the Baltic hospitality industry.

In his commentary, Darius Maikstėnas, Chairman of the Board at Ignitis Group, a Vilnius-based international energy concern, sheds light on the challenges and the opportunities that the company is facing amid ongoing climate change and the new environmental demands.

If you're mulling your trip to Estonia, you may want to delay it to 2024, when Estonia's Tartu will be the European Capital of Culture. How the city is making the preparations is revealed by our reporter's article in the mid-section of the newspaper.

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Changes will also affect the unemployment benefits. Instead of 9 months the maximum duration of these benefits will be reduced to 8 months. The eligible person will be entitled to 75% of the salary starting from the 3rd month of unemployment, 50% of the salary for the 5th and 6th months and 45% for the 7th and 8th months. In 2019, the unemployment benefit was equal to 100% for the first 4 months, 75% from 5th to 6th month, and 50% for the following 3 months.

Pension pillar affected

Another major shift is the opportunity to inherit the 2nd pension pillar. Prior to 2020, this part of the retirement savings was transferred to the government in case the contributor died before reaching the age of retirement. Currently, the principal has a choice and can either instruct to transfer these savings to another person's retirement fund, appoint a beneficiary to receive the money as a lump sum in a will, or leave everything as is – in this case the government will include the money into survivor benefits for children or spouse of the principal.

The State Social Insurance Agency representative says that this change can potentially affect 1 299 000 Latvians who currently participate in the 2nd pillar pension program. “We have already received 51000 notifications from people [in the first 3 weeks of January],” says Ilze Vindele, leading expert in the pension scheme department of the SSIA. “65.2% chose to appoint a beneficiary, 33.3% opted for the money to be added to another person's 2nd pillar pension fund, and 1.4% preferred to leave it as is,” she added.

Gasoline prices

On January 1, right after the New Year countdown, gasoline and diesel prices in Latvia made a notable jump. While the majority of Latvians were still asleep after the big party night, the cost of fuel in the country grew by 1.7% - 6.3%, according to LETA, a news agency. The reasons for this are the tax increase and stricter quality requirements for both gasoline and diesel.

As of January 20, 2020 the price of 1l of 95 octane petrol in Latvia was 1.29 euro, which is 9 cents more than in Lithuania (1.20 euro) and 18 cents less than in Estonia (1.38 euro). Next, all diesel fuel sold in Latvia must now contain at least 7% of biofuel additives, compared to 5% in 2019. For petrol, the required minimum amount of biofuel additives has grown from 5% to 10%.

Living standards to inch up

“Of course, we expect that raising fuel costs will contribute to inflation, but there are other factors such as changes in European policies, growing oil prices, and wage increase, that can be even more important,” says Kristaps Lešinskis, assistant professor of the BA school of business and finance. The Bank of Latvia expects prices to grow by around 2.4% by the end of the year, while wages are projected to

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LITHUANIA: DEATHS EXCEED BIRTHS

As of 1 January 2020, the population of Lithuania was estimated to be 2,669,156 people. This is a decrease of -1.63 % (-44,201 people) compared to population of 2,713,357 the year before. In 2019 the natural increase was negative, as the number of deaths exceeded the number of live births by 13,540. Due to external migration, the population declined by 30,661. The sex ratio of the total population was 0.870 (870 males to 1 000 females) which is lower than the global sex ratio. The global sex ratio in the world was approximately 1 016 males to 1 000 females as of 2019.



LATVIA: BIRTH RATE ON DECLINE

In Latvia, the birth rate in 2019 was lower for the fourth year in a row. Provisional data of the Central Statistical Bureau show that 18 589 births were registered in 2019, which is 725 births fewer than in 2018. The number of children born in 2019 will be specified in May by adding children born abroad. During the last two years 463 children were born abroad (202 in 2018 and 261 in 2017). Last year, decline in the death rate was observed – 27 661 deaths were registered, which is 1 159 deaths fewer than in 2018. The trend has positively affected a negative natural increase – in 2018 there were 9 506 deaths more than births, whereas last year only 9 072 deaths more.

increase by 6%. According to the institution, the average salary can reach 1200 euros before tax at the end of the year. “We can expect an increase in living standard for an average citizen in Latvia, that I think is indisputable. But to what extent and how much - there are different scenarios,” comments Lešinskis.

Technology

The Latvian Government is gradually increasing the number of

electronic services. Consumers and businesses are encouraged to use online communication methods as much as possible. Starting from the beginning of the year construction industry projects documentation can only be submitted electronically. For tax payers, 2020 is the last year they can file tax returns in person or by mail. From 2021, the State Revenue Service (SRS) will also switch to purely electronic

methods of communication (this includes complaints, letters and tax declarations). So this year the SRS will focus on teaching consumers to use their electronic services.

Other than that, Latvians can expect to see a slight reduction in natural gas prices, an increase in the cost of postal services and public transit, a higher tax on alcoholic beverages and waste disposal, and minor changes in the cost of medical services.

Minimum wage in Lithuania

The minimum monthly wage from January 1 in Lithuania will steep by 52 euros from 555 to 607 euros before the deduction of taxes, bringing the take-home pay from 396 to 437 euros. Around 156,000 people in Lithuania make the minimum wage or less, the statistics say.

Pensions and salaries

With pension indexation being pegged in 2020 to growth of wages, pensions this year will grow in Lithuania more than 8% as of January 1. The average monthly old-age pension will reach 377 euros in the New Year, and it will amount to 399 euros for seniors with mandatory working experience. The basic pay rate for civil servants will edge up from 173 to 176 euros, meaning that around 300,000 state officials and civil servants will see their pay rise.

Child benefit payments in 2020 will go up from 50 to 60 euros, and from 70 to 100 euros families raising three or more children, also for low-income families and those raising disabled children.

Income, RE tax

Lithuanians making over 110,000 euros a year will see their income tax rate go up from 27 to 32 per cent. There are over 2,000 top-earners in Lithuania who will be affected by the change, according to statisticians.

Owners of real estate valued at more than 150,000 euros will have to pay real estate tax which until now was applied to properties of over 220,000 euros. Seventy-five percent of the properties are believed to be in the capital city Vilnius. The Lithuanian government expects to add around 2.5 million euros in additional tax revenue to the state coffers.

As a result of the growing fuel excise duties, the price of petrol will go up by around 0.04 euro per litre. The diesel fuel excise for farmers will increase from 56 to 60 euros per 1,000 litres, making one litre of diesel roughly 0.005 euro more expensive.

Daily allowances

Starting January 1, 2020 business trips will be affected. Calculating the non-taxable daily allowance for foreign business trips, the fixed salary of an employee will be compared with the minimum monthly salary or the minimum hourly salary multiplied by a coefficient. The coefficient increases from 1.3 to 1.65 from the year. The amendment eliminates the possibility of increasing the daily allowance rate of foreign business trips for a company director up to 100%.

Conscription age

Starting January 1, 2020, the age range at which men are called up for mandatory military service in Lithuania is lowered to 18-23 years, from 19–26 years currently. Amendments of the Law on Conscription also bar volunteer soldiers from holding seats in the parliament and municipal councils.



ESTONIA: IMMIGRATION IS RISING

According to Statistics Estonia, the preliminary estimate of the population of Estonia as of 1 January 2020 was 1,328,360, which is 3,540 persons more than at the same time a year ago. 13,900 children were born in Estonia in 2019, which is more than 400 fewer children than the year before. There were 15,390 deaths in 2019. Despite the increase in the number of older people, the number of deaths has remained stable in the past decade due to increasing life expectancy.

Stocks

Under new rules in force from February 1, the value of shares vested under stock options not earlier than three years after date of grant will be tax exempt. The main purpose of the changes is to create an additional non-taxable benefit for employees receiving stock options.

Alcohol price goes up

Due to the higher excise tax, the average price of a bottle of alcoholic beverage will go up roughly 0,45 euro from March 1.

The price of electricity will increase 15 per cent for Lithuanian households from the New Year. Meanwhile, gas will be cheaper around 17-22 per cent in 2020.

Changes in education system

At least seven key changes will affect Lithuania's education system this year. Upon agreement with major Education trade unions, teachers' base salary will increase 10%, year-on-year, from September 1, 2020. Practically, the average teacher's pay is expected to go up around 100 euros. Meanwhile, pre-school educators can expect up to 300-euro higher salaries.

Additional class of physical education

Starting September 1, Lithuania's seven graders will see an additional class of physical education added to their curriculums. First and sixth graders have been sweating more in additional physical education classes since last September.

Students will be admitted to Lithuania's vocational schools not only during summer, but in winter too – the first stage of admissions will be organised in early February. This change is thought to help high school drop-outs to choose the path of vocational training.

More state-supported slots in high schools

This year Lithuania has allotted an additional 4 million euros to increase the accessibility of state-supported slots for students in the country. Implementing the university optimisation plan, Siauliai University will be merged with Vilnius University in 2020.

New compensation system for patients

From now on, patients who were mistreated in Lithuanian medical facilities, will be able to sue them three years after the damage was done. Thus, the period of damage claim has been extended. Pecuniary compensations will be paid from the medical facility's account. Until now, insurance funds paid them.

More transparency in pharmaceutical industry

Starting January 1, 2020, pharmacy companies and their representatives are obliged to inform the State Medicine Control Service (VVKT) what support in the form of gift coupons, free medical events abroad and et cetera they have provided to medical facilities. This kind of information will be accessible to all on the VVKT website.

Higher requirements for stroke diagnostics

New orders by the Health minister, Aurelijus Veryga, obligate ambulances to bring patients with suspected stroke within one hour from the placement of the phone call to the emergency room. Meanwhile, tomography must be performed within 30-60 minutes after the arrival of the patient.

Changes to Lithuania's Eurovision 2020

Lithuania's national broadcaster LRT which organises Eurovision

Song contests in the country, has announced that the 2020 national selection will last for six weeks – from early January until mid-February, nearly two months longer than at present. Besides, one artist will be allowed to compete with one song only; the jury will be present, however, they will watch the performances in a separate studio, and will not provide comments after each of the performances; televoting results will not be shown during the show as has been the case until now. They will only be shown at the end of the show.

Teacher salaries set to grow in Estonia

The minimum salary of teachers in Estonia in 2020 will grow to 1,315 euros, with the average climbing to 1,540 euros. The average old-age pension will be hiked by 45 euros of which 7 euro is an extraordinary hike worth 20 million euros in the state budget.

Estonia in UN Security Council

Estonia started work from January 1, 2020 as a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council. Estonian diplomats have been dispatched to New York to represent us at the very heart of world politics for the next two years.

Higher excise duties

Life became a little more expensive for smokers this year as the duty on cigarettes was hiked by 5 percent. This translates into a pack of smokes costing an extra 10 cents on average. The excise duty rates on liquid and natural gas were also hiked, while those on motor fuel remain unchanged. The duties on alcohol, lowered this summer, will also not be hiked in 2020.

Changes on the border

It is very likely the first stage of

eastern border development will be launched this year. A 23.5-kilometer section between the triple border point, where Estonia, Latvia and Russia meet, and Luhamaa. The Police and Border Guard Board (PPA) estimates the construction will take three years.

Pharmacy reform

The commencement of 2020 will reveal the fate of the controversial pharmacy reform. The Riigikogu decided five years ago that the pharmacy reform will enter into force on April 1, 2020. It was agreed that pharmaceutical wholesalers will not be allowed to own pharmacies and that all pharmacies must be owned (at least 51%) by licensed pharmacists.

Pension reform

The other major change in 2020 is the pension reform. Rendering Estonia's current mandatory funded pension, the second pillar voluntary. The Isamaa party behind the reform expected the law to enter into force from January 1. However, the bill was entered into proceedings so late that deliberations will continue this year.

Preparations for 2021 census

The start of 2020 should also shed light on the form the 2021 census will take. While a decision was to be made last year, no agreement has been reached yet. Statistics Estonia has spent millions preparing for a census that would only use national databases for the past decade, while politicians want additional data, for example, on people's language proficiency, dialects and religion that can only be collected in the form of interviews.

Party chairman elections

Elections at Estonia's Reform Party in spring will show how much love members have for chairman Kaja Kallas who won the party the Riigikogu elections but could not deliver it from the opposition.

Far right EKRE will hold in-house elections this year. The ruling Centre Party should also hold elections in 2020.

Tougher crypto laws in Estonia

The Estonian Parliament has approved changes in the Money Laundering and Terrorist Financing Prevention Act (further AML law). As of December 12, 2019, the FIU has issued 1070 virtual currency wallet service provider licenses and 1175 virtual currency exchange licenses. All of the license holders will be directly affected by the changes in the AML law. Changes in AML law will be in force from March 10, 2020.

Changes in Estonian tax system

If the taxable person has not paid the tax by the due date, or if a higher amount has been unduly returned or set off, the taxable person shall be liable for payment of interest from 2020. The interest is calculated at 0.06% per day until the tax debt is paid in full. A taxable person who is in financial difficulties can apply for payment of tax arrears in instalments.

Gabija STRUMYLAITE

Valdas Adamkus, the first president of a post-1990 independent Lithuania, is great to talk to. Attentive, friendly, insightful and open, Adamkus is a trove to any journalist willing to convey the messages the 92-year-old has for everyone: modernity cannot deny traditions but eyes cannot be closed to the societal developments of the world, and in Lithuania heroes do not sit in presidential palaces but are among the hard-working tenacious grassroots. *The Baltic Times Magazine* spoke to Adamkus on a range of issues.

To Americans, Valdas Adamkus is known for cleaning up pollution in Lake Michigan and the other Great Lakes; to Lithuanians, he is known as the president who brought new western standards to the country, thus changing the face of Lithuania in perpetuity.

It would be possible to write an entire volume of Lithuanian history based on Valdas Adamkus' biography. He grew up in Kaunas, the interwar capital of Lithuania. Growing up, his best friends included the son of the third Lithuanian president, Kazys Grinius, and the brother of Vytautas Landsbergis, the first Lithuanian leader after Soviet control. During the Nazi occupation, they began publishing an underground, anti-German newspaper titled, 'Youth, be on duty!' Adamkus fought alongside insurrectionists against Soviet rule, though later he was forced to leave the homeland. Nevertheless, he persistently continued his activities abroad. In 1948, Adamkus contributed significantly while competing at the Olympic Games of the Enslaved Nations. Winning two gold and two silver medals in track and field events, Adamkus is now regarded as the fastest president in the world, with a time of 10.8 seconds in the 100-metre dash. In the summer of 1949, Adamkus went to the United States with his family, and settled into a Lithuanian-American community in Chicago. His life journey, in many ways, mirrors that of the hopeful American Dream – Adamkus started off with just five dollars in his pocket before finding work in a car parts factory. Eventually, he earned a degree from the Illinois Institute of Technology and began working at the newly established US Environmental Protection Agency. Finally, after fifty years of Soviet occupation, Adamkus returned to his motherland and became the president of the Republic of Lithuania in 1998, serving for two terms (1998-2003 and 2004-2009). Even at the age of 92, Valdas Adamkus still continues to rank as one of the most influential political figures in Lithuania.

Chronologically, January, February and March include some of the most significant events for Lithuania – Freedom Defenders' Day, Restoration of the State Day, Restoration of Independence Day. Mr. President, what do each of those dates mean to you, es-

pecially because you have been perceived as the person who has connected two epochs of independent Lithuania?

Both the 16th of February and the 11th of March in a moral and spiritual sense are very similar. February 16th marks the day when the Council of Lithuania unanimously adopted the Act of Independence in 1918, declaring Lithuania an independent state. The 11th of March was the day that Lithuania declared itself independent from the Soviet Union in 1990. There is only one difference; the 16th of February inspired and united people, who, despite very difficult circumstances, still cherished love and focused on creating their own state. Comparatively, the 11th of March commemorates the restoration of Lithuania after the long fight against occupation which lead to the crowning event - receiving independence. It showed that our nation, in the first phase of its independence (from 1918 till 1940, Ed.), was able to rear the strongly patriotic younger generation, who took strength from their parents and built the state of Lithuania on firm, moral legs. It held that there was a strong aspiration for independence during those 50 years of occupation, and it proved to the world that we are determined to live freely and autonomously. These celebrations keep us vital and break the routine, where we are faced with various concerns about people's well-being and the problems of our system in general. The reminiscences of celebrations is something that strengthens us and induces us not to refuse such ideals. After a long time we – however, translated in a more realistic sense – are realizing and will continue to realize, as we move this path forward.

I am a granddaughter of a deportee myself and I grew up listening to my granny's stories from her time in Siberia (during the period 1941-1953, approximately 130,000 Lithuanians were exiled to remote areas of the USSR, in Siberia, the Arctic Circle areas or Central Asia, Ed.). She always emphasized the symbolic importance of the 16th of February. Granny liked to tell how that day was observed by her family – although they were thousands of kilometers from the homeland, they were at least together in thoughts with Lithuania. And how did you – personally and collectively with other Lithuanians – commemorate this date in the so-called free world?

In emigration we did not have such a problem because our whole generation were not economic emigrants of economics but purely political ones. The withdrawal from Lithuania was a protest di-



Valdas Adamkus in his home office in Chicago

rected against the occupation, which had an aim to get back our freedom and independence. The 16th of February became, to us, the source of spiritual strength, which maintained Lithuanianness, determination, and efficient fighting whilst seeking Lithuanian independence. I think that the ceremonies of commemorations themselves did not differ from the commemorations of the interwar Lithuania period. Everything was solemn. And not only in the ranks of one's people's, but also highlighting it in the foreign communities that we were living in.

In one of your books I saw the picture of Marquette Park, where a crowd of Lithuanians with our countries' attributes is depicted. The whole event was held alongside the square, nearby the home of the Chicago mayor. Was this also a particular tradition?

Yes, traditionally it was held in the very center of Chicago. Others often wondered how we managed to get the favour of the city government – because we almost stopped the traffic with our Lithuanian gatherings! Lithuanian flags, solemn speeches... Folk dance groups even used to make short performances! I would say that the celebration of Lithuanian independence was mentioned in astonishing circumstances, attracting the attention of Americans as well.

In the United States, the main center of Lithuanian culture is undoubtedly the city of Chicago. The first Lithuanian emigration wave settled in Bridgeport, but afterwards moved to Marquette

Park, and finally to Lemont. How did Americans evaluate that kind of Lithuanian suburb? What about other foreigners? How did Lithuanians integrate into another state's life?

To my mind, the question of integration is not related to the founding of Lithuanian suburbs in one place or another as you have mentioned. It was self-contained, uniting itself with a goal to maintain the nationality and further develop Lithuanian culture. In my opinion, the concentration of Lithuanians in those separate suburbs led to more permanence – Americans also paid attention to this. They – various officers attending our concerts or celebrations, for instance – were surprised by our national group, which, despite being so far away from the motherland, was not only able to save their identity, but also mature it over the years. It kept hope that matters in the issues of Lithuanian freedom would get better someday. I'm personally proud of our emigrees, who managed to achieve such significant results – *Lithuania's case for independence* became famous worldwide.

I was amazed by your, Mr. Raimundas Mieželis' and other active Lithuanians 1956 initiative of petition to President Dwight D. Eisenhower. You sought that the USA, either by using its direct influence on the Soviet Union or through organizations like the Red Cross, start caring about the destiny of Lithuanian deportees. How did you manage to collect the signatures of Lithuanians while having so little time? Bear-

ing in mind, there was no Internet or other improvements of communication at the time.

Well, firstly, I succeeded in making a very effective, central organizational committee consisting of all organizations which involved Lithuanian youth. It was an unprecedented incident – to bring together representatives of all our active youth organisations' managements, people who were united by one common purpose. It showed that organizations which existed in the United States had a sufficiently sturdy foundation to deal with tasks like the latter. The leaders of the organization, who formed the core of our committee, spread out the petition within their organizations, signing pages all throughout America. Later, we just simply needed to gather and bind them and present it to the President. We knew we had a certain goal, we knew we had a limited time and we got our job done.

In fact, at that time President Dwight D. Eisenhower had some serious health problems and he was replaced by Vice President Richard Nixon. How did your meeting go? Was it your first visit to the Capitol, the White House?

As far as it concerns me and the youth organizations, yes, it was the very first time. Because before that, privilege, or I can even say the monopoly, was in the hands of the Lithuanian American Council (LAC), which was the main American organization guiding the political life of emigrated Lithuanians. But this time it was a different, new, and I believe, for some



The conversation was held in Valdas Adamkus' private office at the Presidential Palace

people unexpected deed, demonstrating that Lithuanian youth can also do something individually and achieve it. Indeed, your observation was correct: it was truly the first time, when in a form of organizational youth, we appeared in the highest state strata.

And what was the impression when you – young people – got so much attention?

Of course, I can answer only for myself. I was happy knowing that our idea finally turned into reality. Our activities received a big resonance not only in our press but also were reflected widely in the American press. Our deed rang through the American Congress because the delegation was accredited there, as well as in the Senate. To conclude, it was not simply a one or two hour performance for American society. It actually echoed from one corner of the country to the other.

It's also worth mentioning that you invited U.S. first ladies – in 1972 Patricia Nixon, in 1976 Betty Ford – to the Lithuanian Folk Dance Festival. How did you manage to do that?

It may be a bit uncomfortable to say but under existing, favourable conditions, using my official status in a relatively high American governmental service, I was able to gain access to the right people – members of government, Congressmen. I simply used those chances by exploiting my personal connections. Concerning the appearances of the first ladies, of course, it gained a huge amount of attention. We assumed all national groups in the United States. The announcement

of Mrs. Nixon's arrival at the opening ceremony of the Folk Dance Festival rang throughout the entire country. Later, many people called me and asked the question, 'How?' It was the first time a person of such a rank participated in an event of a national group. It was a big surprise for everyone, but for us it was more of the recognition.

You spent a big part of your life with „Santaros Šviesos“ (Concord-Light, Ed.) federation and its activities – the periodicals, books, conferences and congresses. Without any doubt it had an enormous impact on Lithuanian political thought and development of a high culture. You also personally knew many bright-minded Lithuanian emigrants. Who among them, in your opinion, are undeservedly forgotten nowadays? What would you recommend for future generations to investigate in the field of emigrated Lithuanians' intellectual heritage?

It's a complicated question to answer. I don't know if I could all that easily pick out who has been forgotten. Perhaps I see the lack of a general analysis of Lithuanian emigrants' contributions covering their creative strengths or emphasizing their works. On the other hand, I think at least the main creators are known to the Lithuanian audience. I'd like more of them to be included in our educational system, so that's why I guess it concerns the teaching aspect more. It's important that our young generation be interested in this while studying and learning. Nevertheless, our emigrants, even in such difficult conditions, man-

aged to keep the spirit of creativity alive and supplement the common Lithuanian cultural heritage.

When I visited the library named in your honor (President Valdas Adamkus Library, Ed.) in Kaunas, I saw with my own eyes how many new shipments were brought in – many boxes of books from the USA, including the personal collection of Aleksandras Štromas. I realized then there is still so much undiscovered about Lithuanian emigrants' heritage. Because I finished high school relatively recently, I can comment that the topic of lives of emigrants is rarely spoken about in schools. It is mostly disclosed during the Lithuanian language and literature lessons, when pupils inspect novels by Marius Katiliškis or Antanas Skėma. Meanwhile, history lessons are quite silent on this subject.

I agree with you totally. And, as I have noticed, there should be more attention paid to analyses of emigrants' ability to save their cultural identity. For instance, examination of results – what it gave to the common Lithuanian culture and the domain of the preservation of Lithuanianness.

In some previous interviews you have mentioned that the values of your promoted liberalism differ from the current Lithuanian liberalism. Could you please tell us what those essential distinctions include?

It's hard to point a finger at it and name it. In my opinion, general striving or, in other words, I don't see the proclamations that

'we organize, conduct and move in a liberal way' realization in Lithuania. Maybe it is caused by outside imperfections which emerge from social conditions. Liberalism had no appropriate foundations to form in Lithuania. In that field we feel that we lack guides and leaders, and that our liberal idea drowns. Sometimes it seems to me that the liberal thought itself – the promotion of the free word, free will and a free mindset – is distorted in Lithuania. Thinking that liberalism opens any liberties which deny the main moral values, deform the liberal ideal and converting it, in some cases, creates chaos. The only hope is that over time, a certain group of people will remain, they won't turn away from set liberal ideals, and then liberalism itself will become valid as one of the essential ideological domains. But, I'll repeat myself, this will take a matter of time.

I also hope that eventually Lithuanian society will become mature enough and we'll have all indications needed for a full-grown democratic country.

On the other hand, it would be naive to expect that we'd be capable of implanting that ideal, whereas the Western world has been pushing its way for several centuries.

Since its formation, the United States has had a two-party system. Which political party was more common among Lithuanian emigrants? Why did you decide to become a Republican?

The bigger part of 'the new' (1940's, Ed.) emigration were Republicans. Why? In the years of the *Democratic-controlled US government, the Yalta conference and other conferences were held. We felt, and I also felt, that we were sold to Russian communism. During emigration we were always involved in political discussions. It was very hard to work our way through the international society. At that time, Republicans felt, let's say, a different rear and were closer to us. They clearly and fearlessly declared their position against the communist order. That's why the new emigration went, with no question, for the Republicans. Meanwhile 'the old' emigration (1905's, Ed.) consisted mostly of working class people who were from the agricultural sphere. And democrats always proclaimed to be those who represented and defended rights of that group exploited by capitalists. There was a collision between 'the new' and 'the old' emigration. Of course, I cannot one hundred percent affirm that the new emigration was only Republican and the old one was only Democratic, but the tendency was noticeable.*

For 27 years you worked in the United States Environmental

Protection Agency. You were an administrator of the Fifth Region (Mid-West) and when you retired from the EPA in 1997, you had the longest tenure of any senior executive. Which skills that you gained came in handy while serving as the President of Lithuania?

Generally speaking, those 27 years in a high administrative office allowed me to cooperate with different countries as the representative of the United States. I met many politicians and members of government. The experience of holding an office gave me much deeper understanding about international problems. So, I could say that I came to the presidential post not from the street but with experience of almost a quarter of a century.

You became acquainted with different U.S. presidents. Are there any characteristics which would unify all of them?

I couldn't say anything concrete. But I can mention that of the six U.S. presidents with whom I worked directly, I could single out President Ronald Reagan. I was impressed by his sincerity, warmth and humanness. Reagan was especially devoted to our Lithuanian ideas. He firmly spoke on the question of Lithuanians receiving national rights, and he more than once approved this attitude internationally – first during the fall of Berlin Wall and then in the context of further events.

What kind of things should Lithuanian politicians learn from U.S. leaders?

The political culture in general. Though we had to endure a period when there weren't any opportunities to grow in surroundings of Western views, we still had to suffer the resulting lack. Well, I hope that while living with today's conditions, we'll learn those lessons. I believe in the young generation of our politicians. They have opportunities to follow what is going on in the world and how other various, contemporary political leaders are reacting – there are plenty of great examples in the Western world. And from all of those experiences, we'll develop a certain political level ourselves.

How does it feel to put your hand on the Constitution and utter aloud the words of the presidential oath?

It's hard to describe in words. During this minute you feel such tension that you don't even realize the importance of that instant. Just later when you start serving, do you take the responsibility and perceive how deep, meaningful and binding this oath is. The only thing which I'd like to say, especially, to the young generation, is that when you swear to the Constitution, you have to respect it, fight for the free man and his natural rights, and it will completely eliminate your private life. Since the moment you take that duty, you refuse your personal goals. Your aim from now on is to give your state and its people everything that you have with the best of your personality and your environment.

Linas JEGELEVICIUS

The Baltic hotel sector is expanding robustly with some top-tier hotel additions awaited later this year. *The Baltic Times* sat down to speak about the sector with Gerhard Erasmus, CEO of Apex Alliance Hotel Management managing several international hotels in the Baltics.

You've spent quite some time as executive in the Radisson Hotel Group and now you have the first half-year as the CEO of Apex Alliance Hotel Management behind you, having worked extensively for various hotels in the West. How does the Baltic hotel business seem to you from a global standpoint?

Needless to say, the Hotel & Restaurant sector has seen a great surge in the Baltics in the last five years. The service industry in the Baltics as a whole is improving rapidly and gaining momentum. I believe from a global perspective, our offering is very attractive, especially when taking the value for money and quality into consideration. Where, I believe, we as an industry need to focus is how we engage with local tertiary institutions in order to support them and help improve the curriculum and program for hotel school students.

Furthermore, to engage and improve our communication with the relevant governments, to highlight the importance of Tourism within their agenda. I believe destination marketing is of the utmost importance, not only for our industry but all industry. By placing a destination such as the Baltics on the map, we stand to attract numerous prospective investors into the countries.

The Baltics have lately seen some major international hotel brands and operators come to Vilnius, Riga and Tallinn. Isn't the arrival a little bit belated?

This is standard practice for some of the larger international brands. You typically find that some brands pioneer new destinations and once the area sees stable growth, then only other international brands tend to enter the market

However, the second and third largest Baltic cities are often bypassed by big international hotel names. What does this speak to you about? Doesn't it signal that the business, culture and social

Hotels will become increasingly more involved with local communities



Gerhard Erasmus is CEO of Apex Alliance Hotel Management

Needless to say, the Hotel & Restaurant sector has seen a great surge in the Baltics in the last five years. The service industry in the Baltics as a whole is improving rapidly and gaining momentum. I believe from a global perspective, our offering is very attractive, especially when taking the value for money and quality into consideration.

life is more robust and active only in the capital cities? Is that what you're seeing in the West?

In the Western EU today you see a major surge in the interest in secondary cities. What I mean by that, is major corporates are starting to host larger events in these cities, investing in offices, distribution centers, shared service centers etc. The local tourism councils are doing much to place these cities on the map from a leisure tour-

ism perspective. I believe we will see a similar trend in the Baltics as well. As an example, we will open and manage a Moxby by Marriott in Kaunas later this year.

Apex Alliance Management operates Hilton and Marriott hotels in Vilnius and Riga. Do the hotels share similar success? In which capital do your hotels do best?

We currently manage hotels only in Vilnius and Riga, our hotel in Tallinn is only due to open at a later

stage. Riga is currently performing better than Vilnius, the main reason being that Vilnius has had a major increase in supply in the last two years. We anticipate the demand to increase in both cities though.

Where do you see room for growth in the Baltic capitals? At whose expense?

I see potential in all the capitals, especially Tallinn. The only risk is when hotel operators reduce their rates in a panic due to the increase in supply. This diminishes the competitive nature of the destination as a whole.

Can you speak please of the strategy of Apex Alliance in hotel assets in selected Baltic and CEE growth markets?

When referring to our strategy from an investment perspective, we have just recently acquired land in Venice Italy and we are building a 300 -bedroom hotel here. We also have a number of projects currently in Bucharest, which we have found to be a very robust market. Our intention again from an investment perspective is to learn more towards Western Europe. From a hotel management perspective, we are flexible and willing to consider management agreements across the entire EU. We are a 3rd party operator, so in essence we help hotel owners to establish Franchise agreements with one of the main International chains and then manage the hotels on the owner's behalf. The white label/3rd Party operator approach is becoming increasingly more popular in the hotel industry. Our ambition is to be the largest 3rd Party Operator in the EU.

Who do you believe are your biggest competitors in the market?

There are a number of 3rd-party operators, however, I would say

that Interstate Hotels has done exceptionally well in establishing this model globally.

What things should we watch for in the hospitality industry in 2020?

I think we will see further attempts and technological advances from hotel companies and OTAs to counter disruptors such as Airbnb in an attempt to retain a fair market share.

Hotels will become increasingly more involved with local communities, in order to overcome the stigma associated with hotels being a stand-alone entity.

The vegan movement will have a major impact on how hoteliers and restaurateurs develop their food menus. #gamechangers

Global warming is on everyone's tongue at the moment, thus the expectation will be that hotels will reduce their impact/ecological footprint e.g. Food Waste Management and reduction of single use plastics

What new additions does Apex Alliance plan in 2020? Where will they be?

We have 3 openings planned for 2020 at this stage: Moxby by Marriott – Bucharest, Moxby by Marriott – Kaunas and Autograph Collection by Marriott – Bucharest.

Is the hospitality legislature (hotel VAT, etc) favorable for your expansion in the Baltics? What could be better in each country?

Currently, we have VAT benefits specifically on accommodation only. It would be of great benefit if a similar approach is applied to restaurants (Food & Beverage). Again, this will enable us to become even more competitive as a destination and relieve the pressure on smaller operators enabling them to invest more in their businesses and staff.

I see potential in all the capitals, especially Tallinn. The only risk is when hotel operators reduce their rates in a panic due to the increase in supply. This diminishes the competitive nature of the destination as a whole

Latvia makes progress in tackling money laundering

Continued from page 1

28 (regulation and supervision of DNFBPs), 32 (cash couriers), 39 (extradition) and 40 (other forms of international cooperation) as "largely compliant".

MONEYVAL has also examined the implementation of new requirements relating to FATF Recommendations which have changed since the mutual evaluation report was adopted (notably

Recommendations 2, 18 and 21). The ratings for Recommendations 18 (internal controls and foreign branches and subsidiaries, rated "largely compliant") and 21 (tip-off and confidentiality, rated as "largely compliant") remain unchanged. The rating for Recommendation 2 is now re-rated as "compliant".

Latvia is now "compliant" on seven of the 40 FATF Recommendations and "largely compliant" on 33 of them.

Philip HOUSELEY

Fanoel Nerini, from Savona in North West Italy, opened La Cantina in central Riga last December. Joined by his brother-in-law, Ivans Varlamovs, La Cantina is both an Italian food shop, and an Italian café serving great Italian wines and Italian cold meats, cheeses and sottoli (mushrooms, sun dried tomatoes, etc.) in extra virgin olive oil, plus a selection of pastas and traditional Italian sweets. His journey from the shores of the blue Mediterranean to the Baltic Sea came via a few years spent in London en route.

So, Fanoel, your birthplace is in a beautiful part of Italy.

Yes, it is close to the French border, and a short drive to Monaco, Nice and all of the French Riviera. But, itself is a very picturesque beach resort.

You are 43 years old now, and when you were just 24, you left Italy to go to the UK and work in New Media in London?

Yes, and in 2002 I obtained a Masters Degree in digital media in London, while working as a software developer.

And your life took a dramatic turn, after a weekend break to Riga?

In 2003, I co-founded a New Media Marketing agency in London. We were in need of recruiting software developers but, being a start-up, we could not afford London salaries. Soon after Latvia joined the European Union, I took a week end break from London and I just fell in love with Riga and with the country. When I returned to the UK, I checked out developers' salaries, vacancies, the cost of living and so on. In August 2004, I moved to Riga and started putting together a small team of 4 or 5 people.

By 2005 we had our Latvian branch fully operative. At our peak we employed 50 persons serving our clients in Italy, the UK and in Latvia.

You were still in software development at this point?

Yes, and we continued happily until towards the end of last year,

BNS/TBT Staff

Eesti Liinirongid AS, the state-owned Estonian operator of passenger trains that conducts its business under the Elron brand, has announced a public procurement for the purchase of six dual system electric trains with the option to buy an additional 10 trains in the future.

"As the number of passengers in Estonian train traffic is growing every month and the popular routes are crowded with people, we and the passengers are already waiting for the new trains to arrive. Unfortunately, we still have to be patient as new trains will start operating on an electrified Tallinn-Tartu railway section, which will be completed in December 2024," Elron CEO Merike Saks said in a press release.

There will be more seats on the new trains and Elron also plans to use the seating relocation option to re-

A new concept of an Italian food shop and café /wine bar in Riga



Fanoel Nerini (on right) opened La Cantina in central Riga last December

Everything we sell comes from Italy, and we have around 25 suppliers. At the moment our Italian wine is sourced here because Italian producers ask for such huge minimum orders, but that will change in the course of time. I return to Italy quite often to taste new products and to negotiate costs

when I decided to leave my company. I needed to do something completely different. I always had in mind from an early age that I would like to get involved in the food industry in some way, preferably in the retail and distribution sector.

So you did a little market research?

Living in Riga for so long I knew there was no shortage of Italian restaurants. There was however a lack of available high-quality Italian products at affordable prices.

And La Cantina, therefore, is just like any Italian corner shop?

Well, yes – I wanted exactly to bring to Latvia the concept of Salumeria! There is a shop like this on most corners in Italy, that is true. But I think we are unique in Riga. In Italy everyone buys from small shops who specialize in cheeses and cold cuts (salami, prosciutto, etc.), and not from supermarkets.

And, in true Italian tradition, you are keeping this business in the family?

Yes. My wife's brother, Ivans Varlamovs is a co-director, and will shortly be running the day to day operation, while I will be spending

time planning to expand the business and products we offer.

Ivans previously worked several years in the restoration of Riga, and at the well-respected Tris Pavaru restaurant, and at the Rocket Bean roastery. So we decided to try this together and we came up with this concept, which we think is fairly new in Latvia.

We are not a restaurant, but we have a selection of cold meats and cheeses that customers can sit down and enjoy with a coffee or a glass of wine or a beer (also Italian), at any time of the day. We also

Living in Riga for so long I knew there was no shortage of Italian restaurants. There was however a lack of available high-quality Italian products at affordable prices.

Estonia: Elron announces public procurement for purchase of 6 trains

spond more flexibly to passengers' expectations. "In the summer months, we want more space for bicycles at the expense of movable seating, while allowing more passengers to sit down in fall and winter," Saks said.

According to the Elron CEO, the procurement has also taken into account passenger feedback to make the seats more comfortable and softer as well as that there be hot drinks and light snacks on the new trains.

"As far as the technical criteria are concerned, it is important to note that the trains to be procured are dual system electric trains operating in both the area of the old

plant for transforming and carrying electric power for train haulage and along the new electrified railway sections," Saks said. She added that while it is difficult to attract train manufacturers with such a small order, potential bidders are Stadler, the manufacturer of Estonia's current trains, and, for example, Skoda, which is building similar trains for Estonia's southern neighbor, Latvia.

"The maximum length of the trains is 85 meters -- primarily due to the maintenance facilities at our depot," Saks said, adding that train manufacturers would definitely be more inclined to supply more

trains at a time, as each batch is designed and built according to the rail infrastructure of that country. The smaller the quantity, the more expensive the trains are, as the cost of designing and setting up the factories to produce the train is over one million euros.

"Estonia has a wider railway,

prepare fresh salads and delicious panini, another Italian classic.

So, opening a restaurant was not an option for you?

I have no experience of the restaurant business, and there are good ones in Riga already. What I did know a lot about was Italian wines, coffees, Pastas, cold meats, cheeses and salads. Everything you can see here can be bought to take home, or can be eaten here in our wine bar area.

Your products all come directly from Italy?

I researched all these, and found the best products and then the best producers. We are very happy with the quality of everything we sell here.

I imagine that ordering the correct quantity of all these products is the most difficult and yet the most important of all your tasks in these early days?

There are minimum orders to contend with as well. It is a task that will become easier as time goes by, that is true. In our early days we erred on the side of caution, and we sold out very quickly. Now we have tweaked everything and all is well!

Everything we sell comes from Italy, and we have around 25 suppliers. At the moment our Italian wine is sourced here because Italian producers ask for such huge minimum orders, but that will change in the course of time. I return to Italy quite often to taste new products and to negotiate costs.

Your early hopes when you first opened – have they been fulfilled?

As far as shop over the counter sales are concerned – yes more than fulfilled.

These are well above predictions. Our luncheon and evening wine bar sales have room for improvement but that is normal so soon after opening.

LETA/TBT Staff

Foreign Minister Edgars Rinkēvičs (JV) plans to place much more emphasis on economic diplomacy this year, the politician told LETA.

"If we are talking about ourselves, we need to look at our external economic cooperation. I have included in this year's work plan a greater focus on economic diplomacy, as well as facilitating visits by high-tech and information technology companies to other countries," the foreign minister said.

He said that it was planned to look in the direction of Africa, as well as those countries where Latvian entrepreneurs representing

Foreign minister plans to place much more emphasis on economic diplomacy

high added value industries are interested in working.

The minister drew attention to the fact that Latvia has invited the President of Belarus Alexander Lukashenko to visit the country. "This is a classic example where our companies are not ready to seize opportunities.

For many years, we have done our best to ensure good relations between the two countries. At a time when there is interest in economic cooperation, our businessmen, who often complain that, for

example, relations between Latvia and Russia are interfering with their business, are not ready enough to work together with Belarus," Rinkēvičs explains.

The foreign minister said that Belarus has concrete proposals for oil transit that some are not ready for, while other ports are ready to act.

"This is a fantastic example that not everything is determined by political relations. It is also about our business readiness," said the politician.

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Darius MAIKSTENAS

A worldwide change in consumer mentality means that states and companies that will be able to offer goods without a carbon footprint will soon have the greatest competitive advantage. Greta Thunberg's generation will be increasingly buying only goods that are environmentally friendly. The competitive struggle between companies for the supply of sustainable goods and sustainable services has already begun. The energy sector is not an exception.

Today we can distinguish the famous Swedish company IKEA as a perfect example of the global trend of decarbonisation. The company has recently pledged to reduce its greenhouse gas emissions by 80% by 2030. The concern and responsibility of Europeans about the environmental impact that will continue to grow can also lead to the fact that products with a carbon footprint will not even be able to enter EU markets in the future.

This is one of the reasons why in 2019 Ignitis Group became the first company from the Baltic States and Poland to join the United Nations initiative and has committed itself to reduce net CO₂ emissions to zero by 2050. As we joined this ambitious initiative, we have committed ourselves to review our strategy and set intermediate scientifically measurable targets on how gradual decarbonization will be pursued in all activities of the group.

Decarbonization is a word that we hear more and more often lately and increasingly loudly. It most accurately describes the direction in which the energy sector is moving around the world, and will move on for many years to come. The reason for this is simple: the effects of climate

In the era of climate change, Lithuania must become the centre of future energy



change can no longer be ignored. They must be faced with consistent and thoroughly planned initiatives.

The European Union, which is not only declaring but also purposefully acting to earn the name of a global leader in renewable energy, is undoubtedly one of the fore-runners of today. The EU Member States spend trillions of euros on the development of new, unconventional energy technologies that allow both to save and contribute to a cleaner environment. Indeed, in the global battle for the smartest, most reliable and best-decarbonized power generation technologies they are increasingly forced to counter the challenges posed by China and the United States.

The growing attention of major global economies to energy technologies that reduce their carbon footprint is a message that goes beyond cautious optimism about climate change mitigation. This rippling wave of green energy development is also a historic opportunity for Lithuania to find its niche and become one of the centres of energy-smart technology.

It is vital for Lithuania to be among those countries that will not only master, but will also actively contribute to the develop-

ment of new energy technologies. Our country has every opportunity for that, and the first steps have already been taken.

Ignitis Group, along with international giants such as Hyundai, Honda, and BP, is investing in start-ups that develop future energy technologies and decarbonization solutions worldwide. This not only allows to make Lithuania famous as a serious player in international markets but also to ensure that we will be at the forefront of technological *know-how*.

I will give just a few specific examples. In the autumn of last year, the Smart Energy Fund of Ignitis Group invested in Israeli company H2Pro that develops innovative and environmentally friendlier hydrogen production technology. Further development of green production technologies of hydrogen, which is often considered the fuel of the future, will not only reduce the current dependence on fossil fuels worldwide but will also significantly reduce air pollution. Production of hydrogen from fossil fuels is estimated to be responsible for 2% of global carbon dioxide (CO₂) emissions per year.

Earlier, the aforementioned Smart Energy Fund of our Group directed

investments towards British start-up Moixa that develops smart energy storage devices and virtual power plant technologies, a tool that automates the design of solar power plants which is being developed in Lithuania by a company PVcase, and towards Bolt Bikes, the world's first platform for commercial electric bike rental services.

Activities of the aforementioned companies may seemingly appear slightly distant from one another. However, they are all united by a common denominator – intelligence of applied energy solutions that help to create a decarbonized world.

Decisive steps towards lower air pollution and protecting the environment have been taken not only by investing in new energy technologies but also by actively developing green production in Lithuania and abroad. For example, in Poland, Ignitis Renewables is currently building a Pomeranian wind farm which is one of the largest in the country. The company has already been awarded for this project by the Polish Embassy in Vilnius as “The largest Lithuanian investment in Poland 2019”. Such international expansion means that Polish subsidies for the development of wind energy are brought to Lithuania and used for further development.

In Lithuania itself, the last year can be called the year of a certain revolution in renewable energy. After the entry into force of legislative changes that allow electricity to be generated in one place and consumed in another, we were the first ones in the world to introduce a nationwide community solar platform “Ignitis saulės parkai”. On this platform, consumers can quickly and easily purchase or rent a portion of a remote solar power plant, even if they live in an apartment building.

In other words, becoming electricity-producing consumers in Lithuania is possible today without much effort or investment. A desire is all that is needed for this purpose, and it seems that society does not lack it. The survey that was carried out in 2019 for Ignitis Group showed that 50% of Lithuania's population would like to generate electricity from the sun because environmental protection and social responsibility are important to them. This indicator is a great illustration of the fact that concerns about the environment and the preservation of the planet are becoming increasingly important for an increasing number of the society members that takes this into account in their daily choices.

Attention to renewable energy and to creation and development of innovations in the energy sector is also embedded in the company's strategy “Ignitis 2030”. We have planned that by 2030 around 6 billion euros will be allocated for increasing production capacity in the field of green energy, for international development, and for the development and implementation of innovations in the energy sector. And by that date, the overall green production capacity of Ignitis Group will be 3,000 MW.

Darius Maikstenas is CEO, Chairman of the Board at Ignitis Group, a Vilnius-based international energy company and one of the largest energy groups in the Baltic region. Group companies operate in Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Poland and Finland. The Group innovation fund invests in energy start-ups in the UK, Norway and France.

Vilnius University's rector-elect reflects on priorities



Vilnius University's rector-elect historian Rimvydas Petrauskas vowed on January 21 to pursue the university's greater leadership in speaking with the country's leaders and other politicians “on the real priority of science and studies”. Petrauskas, dean of Vilnius University's Faculty of History, was on Wednesday elected rector of Vilnius University, the oldest and biggest university in Lithuania. He was elected for a five-year term by the university's council which considered six candidates.

Aldona DREGVAITE

Self-determination – a memorable speech under this title was delivered by Prof. Richard Ennals in Vilnius on the 24th of January at the solemn ceremony at which he was awarded an Honorary Doctorate (Honoris Causa) by Kazimieras Simonavičius University, a young private Lithuanian university, with which he has been associated since its foundation.

The Rector Prof. Arūnas Augustinaitis and the Senate of Kazimieras Simonavičius University awarded Prof. Richard Ennals the honorary doctorate for his outstanding scientific achievements and extraordinary merits in promoting cooperation between Kazimieras Simonavičius University and other Lithuanian, British and European universities, for his active role in collaborative research and for his continued support of Lithuania during the 30 years of restored independence.

Her Majesty's Ambassador to Lithuania HE Brian Olley participated in the ceremony. In his speech he stressed the importance of education and lifelong learning. He wished graduates of Kazimieras Simonavičius University to always work for the good – in public sector or in business. And always think about the long-term outcome, not the short-term benefits.

Prof. Ennals, the just inaugurated Honorary Doctor of Kazimieras Simonavičius University, in his speech pointed out that “there is so much that we can do together, now and in the future, creating collaborative advantage, in a partnership for the new organization of work and of international relations”.

“We live in historic times. One week from today on the 31st January 2020, my country, the United Kingdom, will leave the European Union, and move on to an uncertain and uncharted future. We all like to feel “in control” of our own destinies. The UK today, with a long proud history of stability, has much to learn from the experience of Lithuania over the past 30 years. In early 1990, the Lithuanian people wanted to regain control of their national destiny, and to leave the Soviet Union, just as the people of Tibet wanted a new relationship with China. The Soviet Union was crumbling, and the Baltic States were preparing to regain their independence. My father and I visited Vilnius in April 1993. He was awarded the 13th January Medal in memory of the 14 Lithuanians who died at the television tower in



Prof. Richard Ennals: Self-determination means democratic participation and empowerment



Prof. Richard Ennals



Brian Olley was appointed Her Majesty's Ambassador to the Republic of Lithuania in September 2019

The Rector Prof. Arūnas Augustinaitis and the Senate of Kazimieras Simonavičius University awarded Prof. Richard Ennals the honorary doctorate for his outstanding scientific achievements and extraordinary merits in promoting cooperation between Kazimieras Simonavičius University and other Lithuanian, British and European universities

Vilnius on 13th January 1991”, said Prof. Ennals.

In his speech Prof. Ennals also pointed out that “self-determination operates at several levels: for individuals, for young people in their education and career choices, in the

workplace, and at the level of national policy. Key issues are democratic participation and empowerment. The process of change in Lithuania has been peaceful, involving the creation of a stable multi-party democracy. This has enabled massive

political and economic transformation, during the lives of our young graduates. Many Lithuanians have come to live, study and work in the UK. Regaining independence did not preclude pooling sovereignty by joining the European Union and



According to Prof. Ennals, “self-determination involves a preparedness to take action, taking personal risks, and exploring new ideas. In the academic world this can take the form of networking and Action Research, as we design and implement transformations

Panevezys court to hear Lithuanian ex-judge Venckiene's case

BNS/TBT Staff

Panevezys Regional Court will hear the case of Neringa Venckiene, a former Lithuanian judge and lawmaker who was extradited from the United States last year.

The Lithuanian Court of Appeal made the decision after considering a request from Kaunas Regional Court, where Venckiene has

worked in the past, to refer the case to another court.

The Court of Appeal said on January 23 that this would remove any possible doubts about the impartiality of trial judges.

Venckiene, who worked as a judge at Kaunas Regional Court for almost five years, and Kaunas judges who will hear her case were not only colleagues, but, possibly, friends as well,

according to the Court of Appeal.

“This provides a sufficient basis for referring the criminal case to another regional court for hearing,” it ruled.

Venckiene was charged with refusing to obey a court order, resisting a police officer, hindering a bailiff, and hitting Laimute Stankunaite, the mother of her niece, in the face.

Venckiene was remanded in

the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). Lithuania has developed a strong partnership with the United Kingdom, which we hope and expect will continue on a bilateral basis”.

According to Prof. Ennals, “self-determination involves a preparedness to take action, taking personal risks, and exploring new ideas. In the academic world this can take the form of networking and Action Research, as we design and implement transformations. The future will not be just the same as the past. At Kazimieras Simonavičius University, our new graduates today know this only too well, from their own personal experience over their short lives. We can build a new future, working with networks of partners”.

Richard Ennals was Professor at Kingston Business School from 1990, since 2013 he has been an Emeritus Professor at Kingston University, London. He currently has part-time Professorial posts at the University of Agder (Norway) and the Norwegian University of Science and Technology. He has Visiting Professorial posts at Mykolas Romeris University and Kazimieras Simonavičius University (Lithuania), and is engaged in research with Kathmandu University (Nepal), Sabanci University (Turkey) and the University of Cape Town (South Africa). The common themes are participation and empowerment.

Prof. Richard Ennals currently works with universities in many countries. New technology, including a new app Chillchat, developed by his son Robert Ennals in Silicon Valley, can support human networks in working across borders of disciplines and countries, creating new opportunities. This technology could enable broad participation, and empower academics, students and their partners in the community and business. For example, in February, together with colleagues at Sabanci University in Turkey, Prof. Ennals will start teaching a new Industrial PhD program in Action Research, together with partners in Norway, Brazil, Nepal, South Africa, the Netherlands, UK and the USA. In September they will welcome participants from Lithuania, and in particular from Kazimieras Simonavičius University

Lithuania's Justice Minister opines on political prosecution



Justice Minister Elvinas Jankevičius has called on the European Union to improve its existing legislation or to adopt new legal acts to ensure that the bloc's citizens are protected from political prosecution

by third countries. Jankevičius put forward the proposal at an informal meeting of EU justice and interior ministers in Zagreb, the Lithuanian Justice Ministry said on January 23.

Lithuania's President Nausėda invites Poland's Pekao bank to Lithuania

President Gitanas Nausėda has invited Poland's Pekao bank to start its business in Lithuania after discussing the issue with the Polish bank's CEO Marek Lusztyn in Davos, an adviser said. In his words, the meeting discussed a possibility for Pekao representatives to come to Lithuania to assess the existing market situation. Lithuania's banking sector is one of the most concentrated in the EU, with three major banks, including Swedbank, SEB and Luminor controlling four fifths of the market.

LETA/TBT Staff

During foreign policy debates at Saeima on January 24, Foreign Minister Edgars Rinkevics (New Unity) emphasized that the financial sector turmoil witnessed in 2018 implies that if Latvia wants to be seen as a mature country, it must behave like an adult and not an adolescent and understand that nobody else will clean its house.

The whole world is a big tear, quoting writer and poet Janis Poruks, said the politician, stressing that world events will influence the situation in Latvia. The solution to the escalating problems can only be achieved through dialogue and diplomacy, the politician stressed.

Although some solutions have been achieved within the Normandy format, the situation in Ukraine has not changed dramatically. Nor can climate change be ignored, where the human factor is the key. Slogans are not enough to mitigate the devastating effects of human beings on nature - human action is needed, the politician said, and therefore the European Commission's initiatives to achieve climate neutrality should be supported.

Rinkevics emphasized that China's involvement in global processes presents both opportunities and challenges, stating that China is a European partner and a competitor at the same time.

No matter how dramatic last year may have been, global efforts, including by the EU, the United States, China and Russia, will be needed to maintain international order and peace this year, he said.

The minister reminded that today marks one year since the approval of Krišjānis Kariņš (New Unity) government, adding that one of the main points in the government declaration is security, which was not randomly chosen. The goal of Latvia's foreign policy is consistent - to promote stability, security and predictability.

Latvian Foreign Minister: “If we wish to be perceived as a mature state, we cannot behave like teenagers”



Latvian Foreign Minister Edgars Rinkevics

The politician stressed that the US is and will be a strategic partner of Latvia on political, economic and security issues. "Without the U.S. presence, Latvian and European security is impossible," the minister concluded, saying that transatlantic cooperation with other countries, including Canada, would be strengthened.

Rinkevics noted that Latvia is strongly in favor of adherence to international principles. "We are in favor of comprehensive cooperation in the Nordic-Baltic region. We support the enlargement of both the EU and NATO if all the criteria are met. We are also ready to cooperate with countries with which we have significant disagreements," the minister said.

He also stated that Latvia's active participation in international organizations is one of the tools to strengthen sovereignty, the rule of law, security and economic growth, and that the United States and other allies provide invaluable support for Latvia's defense. "Since the restoration of Latvia's independence, the involvement of the United

States in strengthening security in the region has never been more felt than it is now. We are thankful for that," the politician said.

"There is no doubt that after Brexit it will have to go through a political and economic transformation. It is essential for our country to forge closer ties with Britain, including in regards to Latvian citizens working in that country. After Brexit, the EU will not become a historical artifact, no matter what some might say. We will have to work hard for the future of Europe. In our discussions we will have to bear in mind that Europe will not be built immediately, but will be shaped by specific achievements," the minister said.

The politician reminded that Latvia has been in the EU for more than 15 years. In his view, the moment has come when Latvia has be-

come sufficiently capable not only to follow EU policies, but also to be help create them. "Latvia is a leader in several areas, such as cyber security and the fight against disinformation," the politician said.

Latvia also supports EU enlargement as it is in line with Latvia's long-term interests, emphasized the minister, though stressing that the EU has borders and it cannot be endless. "The EU's enlargement policy must be open to those countries that are ready to meet the criteria," he said.

"I want to see as soon as possible a day where Latvia will contribute more to the EU budget than it receives, but now it is our task to achieve a favorable multi-annual budget, which will certainly be influenced by Brexit. It is clear that Latvia will receive more it contributes. In the process of changing the structure of the EU budget, Latvia's perception of attracting financing should also change. Latvia needs to develop its ability to raise funds from other EU budget programs as well," said Rinkevics.

He stressed the need to be more creative and proactive in attracting EU funding by being able to create projects with high added value. Latvia has a lot of creative people and great ideas, as well as a lot of great startups, the politician explained, adding that Latvia could become a leader in 5G.

An intolerant attitude towards money laundering is also important and sufficient efforts should be

made to detect and stop such cash flows as much as possible, he added.

"Our experience so far and the turmoil in the financial sector in 2018 point to one important lesson. If we are to be seen as a mature country, then we must behave not as a teenager who cleans up his room only when his parents ask for a third time, but as an adult, which realizes that no one else will clean the house for him," the minister stressed.

Rinkevics also addressed the diaspora, emphasizing that professionals from different parts of the world are already helping to identify partners for Latvian entrepreneurs.

Latvia maintains a two-way policy with Russia, the minister explained. "We cannot ignore the concentration of Russian military forces in Kaliningrad, which is a strong demonstration of Russian power," said Rinkevics.

"We pay our respects to the millions of victims who died during World War II. This year will mark the 75th anniversary of World War II. We understand that there would have been no independent Latvia in Hitler's Third Reich. At the same time, we condemn the attempts by Russia to justify the crimes committed by Stalin," the minister stressed.

Coordinated action by the Baltic States, Poland and other countries in communicating history is important. "As long as Russia continues to rewrite history and justify totalitarian regimes, a shared security space is not possible," the politician said.

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World cleanup leaders from 100 nations gather in Tallinn



possibility to make our home planet cleaner, world cleanup day also offers an opportunity to change one's habits.

"Our children will be able to live well when all people -- national leaders, scientists, entrepreneurs, consumers -- will make a contribution to the balance between the environment, people and the economy. It is our day-to-day hab-

its that form the foundation of necessary change. Therefore I am glad that the cleanup actions of Estonia have evolved into a global movement for cleanliness and through it into a brand of Estonia. My heartfelt gratitude goes out to every one of you who are contributing their time and energy toward our common future," the premier said.

The manager of Let's Do It

World, Anneli Ohvril, said that world cleanup is a model that has proved itself in helping to find a new sustainable society model. She said that unless a change occurs in laws, infrastructure, habits and values, the places cleaned up will be littered up again.

"We must join our forces to reach the critical mass of five percent of people in each country. Only in this way can we initiate informed fast action towards a sustainable future," Ohvril said.

This year's conference places special emphasis on cooperation with civil society, public sector and business organizations. In joint panels, the floor will be taken by the UN, the African Union, but also Earth Day, one of the oldest environmental organizations in the world. Presentations will be delivered by Break Free From Plastic, Philip Morris and Decathlon, among others, and also a number of workshops and thematic discussions to find solutions together will be held.

On Sept. 21, 2019 a record 21.2 million people in 180 countries and territories, including 1.6 million in India, 1.7 million in the United States, 2.5 million in Pakistan and 9.5 million in Indonesia cleaned up 100 tons of waste from their communities, parks, forests, rivers and oceans. The millions of volunteers were led by national cleanup leaders, environmental organizations and global corporations, who have all decided to act for a cleaner, more sustainable planet.

The conference also looked at the future of the global organization led from Estonia by electing new regional directors and leaders and deciding which country will organize the global cleanup day in 2021.

The conference was supported by the European Regional Development Fund through Enterprise Estonia, Estonian Foundation for Civil Society, British Council in Estonia, Baltic American Freedom Foundation and many more.

Latvian Public Broadcasting TBT Staff

The government of Prime Minister Krišjānis Kariņš (New Unity) has now been in office for one year, and Kariņš himself used the occasion to issue a statement rounding up what he believes are his achievements over the last twelve months.

"Three months after the 13th Saeima elections, the parties agreed on a model of cooperation to form a government with five political parties. It is no secret that from the very first day, there were various speculations about the incompatibility of so many parties, as it potentially meant a cumbersome process for reaching any decision. Practice has proven otherwise: despite sometimes long and arduous discussions, this government has been able to not only set specific goals but also achieve step by step improvements in various areas, from financial sector supervision to the local government administration and essential health care and education," Kariņš said.

During its first year, the government of Prime Minister Krišjānis Kariņš has held 60 cabinet meetings: 48 scheduled meetings and 12 extraordinary meetings. The total duration of these meetings was 137 hours, equivalent to nearly 6 days and nights.

According to the government's

PM Karins marks one year in power, targets rule of law improvement for year two



Prime Minister Krišjānis Kariņš

own figures it dealt with a total of 2,307 items, with an average of 47 items per session.

691 Cabinet regulations were adopted, 656 Cabinet orders were approved and 7 Cabinet instructions were approved.

243 draft laws and 1 draft Saeima resolution were approved and sent to the Saeima.

Krišjānis Kariņš issued 362 Prime Ministerial orders during the year, which obviously works out at an average of almost exactly one per day. Perhaps he issues one every morning with his cornflakes and vitamin pill?

"From day one, we have been

working to achieve a higher level of prosperity in the country by reducing inequality and building trust among ourselves and in public administration. I have described this as "the path to Nordic prosperity." This is the way to increase investment in our economy, the way to greater fairness and justice in our society.

"The first year of the government has done a tremendous job of streamlining the supervision of the financial sector. When taking over the reins of government, I defined it as an urgent priority. About half a year before the government came in, our financial sector supervisory

system had received a negative international rating. In effect, this meant that fundamental changes were needed to prevent the country from being on the so-called "gray list", which could seriously damage our economy.

"In the course of the year, the government has expanded the mandate of the Financial and Capital Market Commission (FKTK), implemented legislation to prevent money laundering, and has a new FKTK management and a new Governor of the Bank of Latvia. We have strengthened our financial sector to serve well as the backbone of the economy," Kariņš said.

Meanwhile, work on local government reform continues despite opposition from many local councils that face the prospect of mergers or liquidation.

"The debate on new municipalities is an emotional one for many, and it is understandable. Economic and practical considerations sometimes clash with local identities and habits. I am convinced that members of the Saeima will be able to agree on a new model for

local governments. It is important to remember that municipalities must be strong and capable of performing the functions entrusted to them," Kariņš said.

Turning to the future he said that the next twelve months would require his ministers "to be able to provide the public with answers to other long-standing questions" in areas such as speeding up the sluggish pace of the legal system, establishing a tax system in which non-payment is not an option and improving education and health-care provision.

"In the last thirty years, we have done a lot to make our country what we want it to be. The foundations are laid and they are solid. Our job is to strengthen them. Democracy means that the citizens themselves believe in the state system. Strengthening justice and the rule of law in the country is the task of the second year of government work that we must do together," the prime minister concluded.

As reported at the time by LSM, the Kariņš administration took office on January 23, 2019

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Tartu is designated European Capital of Culture for 2024

Joseph ENGE

After a two-year journey that started in the fall of 2017 when the city council of Tartu voted to apply for being the European Capital of Culture for 2024, the official announcement they were awarded this prestigious distinction came on August 28 of 2019. This journey has 4 more years to go and has only just began. Tartu is not the first Estonian city to win this title as Tallinn held it in 2011. The choice for 2024 came down to Tartu and Narva with Narva losing out. The questions are how did Tartu navigate the process to win, how do prominent artists in Tartu feel about it, and what are the preparations in progress for five years hence?

The idea of having a rotating European Capital of Culture started in 1985 from the Greek Minister of Culture Melina Mercouri and the French Minister of Culture Jack Lang. Athens was the chosen that first year. Presently, the award also comes with 1.5 million euro prize for each city selected managed by the European Commission combined with other matching funds from the EU and host nation. Due to Brexit, five U.K. cities applying for the 2023 designation were disqualified in 2017.

Tartu's Mayor Urmas Klaas took the initiative bringing together wide-spread talent that is readily available in a city referred to as "Athens on the Emajõgi" in reference to the University of Tartu and its interconnectedness with the city's life and atmosphere. Academics, art, literature, and business start-ups are intertwined and intermingled in a rather unique way that locals are very proud.

Mayor Klaas responded to *The Baltic Times Magazine's* question of why Tartu's bid was successful by answering, "In my opinion Tartu's success in winning the title comes down to three key factors: smart work, active participation, and good team spirit. Secondly,

The idea of having a rotating European Capital of Culture started in 1985 from the Greek Minister of Culture Melina Mercouri and the French Minister of Culture Jack Lang. Athens was the chosen that first year.

Lithuanian President reflects on Polish discrimination issue

BNS/TBT Staff

Lithuanian Poles are a state asset, Lithuanian President Gitanas Nausėda says, adding that issue of ethnic discrimination is being raised artificially "to pursue narrow political interests".

In a Facebook post on January 22, Nausėda said "we share long years of common history and fight for freedom" with the Polish nation. "Poles in Lithuania, just as other



our candidacy team involved a lot of people. Around 1,000 people helped to shape our bid by offering ideas, sharing their experiences or professional insights on the culture and life in Tartu and southern Estonia. As Tartu is the home to many start-up companies, it was symbolic we chose to tell the jury short speeches just like start-up entrepreneurs do when they present a potentially world-changing business idea. Everyone from our team, from young creative and social entrepreneurs to university professors delivered an elevator pitch type of short speech – telling the panel about their passion for Tartu and southern Estonia, its culture and development and connecting personal stories to Tartu 2024 application and all-European themes."

Tartu's renowned writer of books, movies, and film director Mart Kivastik said to *The Baltic Times Magazine*: "I am happy about it. I

think we (Tartu) have earned it. The same time nothing would have happened without being European culture capital. I mean we do all those things anyway; Tartu is a town with the 'spirit.'"

Juhan Kari, a free-lance cultural manager, reacted by saying, "Tartu's selection for CC2024 couldn't come at a better time! Almost

every generation before has had a common adversary, a virulent and perpetual occupation of our land and people. Estonian culture has been the main thing that bonded our nation together against this common foe - like a secret society under the years of repression."

Internationally famous painter Ilmar Kruusamäe had an interest-

Tartu Mayor Urmas Klaas: "In my opinion Tartu's success in winning the title comes down to three key factors: smart work, active participation, and good team spirit"



ing perspective to *The Baltic Times Magazine*, stating, "I was born in Tartu and have lived in Tartu for the last 45 years, I'm a Tartu man. Politically, Tartu was politically executed in the battle for the 2011 European Capital of Culture election. At that time, Tartu would have deserved and needed more the Capital of Culture title than Tallinn. The 2024 Capital of Culture title would have been a greater incentive for Narva and the whole of Virumaa (Rakvere, Jõhvi, etc.). Giving Tartu the title of Capital of Culture was like reheating old spit, doing little for Virumaa."

This same sentiment was echoed by Tartu painter and artist Margus Lokk who responded, "I'm very positive about Tartu 2024, but at the same time maybe Narva was more interesting for Estonians and for all of Europe as a border city and Narva needs help, but in reality Narva was not ready for this. Tartu is every day a European cultural capital; there are so much different cultural and university events and just students' activity."

Tartu's title will be more than just the city itself, rather the whole region of southern Estonia. Tartu signed an agreement with 19 municipalities throughout the region to be a part of its application. When asked about the next step Mayor Klaas responded, "The title of European Capital of Culture could be a major driver of development for the whole of southern Estonia. Everyone agrees on this potential as already in April this year, the City of Tartu and the 19 municipalities from the region signed the Tartu 2024 goodwill treaty, which resulted also in the whole area being included in the Cultural Program of the application.

Now we need to craft out the regional specifics of funding, developing and carrying out these new cultural projects, but also the action plans how do we cooperate on the matters of transport connections and hospitality which make up the great experience we want the visitors of Tartu 2024 European Capital of Culture in Tartu and southern Estonia to have! As soon as possible, already in October the City of Tartu is going to meet with all the leaders of the municipalities and agree on the specific next steps. Exciting times are waiting ahead for our region."

basis, using power given to me by the Constitution. I also swore to serve for the welfare of all people in Lithuania, therefore, I am and will be principled towards nepotism, irrespective of which party it involves," the president said.

Nausėda stressed that he gave oath to be equally fair to everyone "irrespective of ethnicity, religion or world outlook".

"I am true to my oath and if needed, I will protect our state citizens from discrimination on any

the issue of alleged discrimination, linking absolutely unrelated issues like ethnicity and ability to perform duties," the president said.

His comments came in response to Prime Minister Saulius Skvernelis' recent statement during an interview with the delfi.lt new website when he said that discussions on Transport Minister Jaroslav Narkevicius "getting similar to ethnic discrimination".

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LFGU leader vows to sign under MP Rozova impeachment initiative

BNS/TBT Staff

Ramunas Karbauskis, leader of the ruling Lithuanian Farmers and Greens Union, has vowed to sign under the opposition's initiative to launch impeachment proceedings against MP Irina Rozova over her concealed tied with Russian diplomats.

"We have talked that I and the committee chairman will sign it, if such a proposal is made," Karbauskis told journalists at the parliament on January 23, adding that he's not aware of how other LFGU members would act.

"We are definitely in favor of investigating everything, to clear things out and we will definitely not be putting any breaks on these processes. On the other hand, I am a bit confused about the whole rush," Karbauskis said.

In his opinion, it would be more rational to initiate impeachment proceedings against Rozova after the parliamentary Committee on National Security and Defense finishes its investigation.

Previously, the opposition representatives on the Lithuanian parliament's Committee on National Security and Defense (CNSD) announced their decision to initiate impeachment proceedings against Rozova, representing the Electoral



MP Irina Rozova

Action of Poles in Lithuania – Christian Families Alliance's political group, over her allegedly concealed ties with Russian diplomats.

The impeachment text is being drafted and the necessary number of votes is expected to be collected early next week. At least 36 lawmakers are needed to initiate impeachment proceedings. An impeachment commission would look into whether there's a basis to launched impeachment proceedings over a breach of oath.

The parliamentary investigation was initiated after it came to light that the State Security Department had recommended in its report to Viktoras Prancietis, the speaker of

the Seimas, that MP Rozova be denied access to classified information.

The report says that Rozova and Russian diplomats discussed financial support for her party, the Russian Alliance, and that she had contacts with Russian Consul General Vladimir Malygin who was sent out of Lithuania in 2014.

Rozova insists that her contacts with Russian diplomats were not personal and, therefore, she did not have to report them to the intelligence agency when applying for access to classified materials.

Rozova is a member of the Electoral Action of Poles in Lithuania – Christian Families Alliance's political group in the Seimas.

Lithuanian PM nominates Savickas for economy minister

BNS/TBT Staff

Lithuanian Prime Minister Saulius Skvernelis on January 24 submitted the candidature of his adviser Lukas Savickas for the country's economy minister, the president's spokesman confirmed it to BNS.

"The presidential office is now considering this candidate," Antanas Bubnelis said, adding that Savickas has not been discussed comprehensively so far.

The prime minister said the candidate "is the right person for this position, having the competences and characteristics needed for this position".

"I have no doubt people of Lithuania would feel and appreciate such a minister's work. I have no other candidate for this position. I hope this candidate will be approved," the prime minister said in a statement.

Savickas has worked as an adviser to the prime minister on economic and strategic change matters since December, 2016. He was elected to Vilnius Municipality Council under the LFGU list earlier this year.

Savickas has a Master's degree in European public affairs from Maastricht University in the Netherlands, and also has a BA degree in politics and international relations from York University in the UK.



Following his studies, Savickas returned to Lithuania and worked for the country's foreign investment promotion agency Investuok Lietuvoje (Invest Lithuania). During the implementation of the Kurk Lietuvai (Create Lithuania) program, Savickas implemented projects for this agency and the government's chancellery, and he also worked for the association Investor's Forum as head of policy and public affairs.

The position of economy minister has been vacant since December when the then Minister Virginijus Sinkevicius became a European commissioner.

According to Bubnelis, the prime minister and president also discussed candidates for director of the Public Procurement Office but there are no nominated candidates yet.

The Public Procurement Office has no director since October when Diana Vilyte resigned.

The economy minister and the PPO director are appointed by the president upon submission by the prime minister. Candidates for these positions have not been officially nominated yet.

The meeting was held amid disagreements over Transport Minister Jaroslav Narkevicius.

Earlier this week, the president once again called on the prime minister to sack Narkevicius after the decision by the Chief Official Ethics Commission. The transport minister was to have placed himself in a conflict of interest situation last year when his lunch was paid for by the Klaipeda port authority and the Lithuanian Road Administration.

Lithuania up to 35th place in corruption perception index



BNS/TBT Staff

Lithuania went up three notches to the 35th position among 180 countries in the Corruption Perceptions Index last year after the country scored 60 out of 100 points, Transparency International announced on January 23.

Lithuania saw its result improve for the first time since 2015. Since then and up to 2018, Lithuania scored 59 points each year.

Lithuania ranks 15th among EU member states, with Denmark leading with 87 points. Estonia received 74 points and ranked 18th (73 points and 18th place in the 2018 index). Latvia received 56 points and ranked 44th (58 points and 41st place in 2018), and Poland ranked 41st with 58 points (60 points and 36th place in 2018).

According to Transparency International, the index, which ranks 180 countries and territories by their perceived levels of public sector corruption according to experts and businesspeople, uses a scale of 0 to 100, where 0 is highly corrupt and 100 is very clean.

Transparency International Lithuanian Chapter points out to the incumbent Lithuanian government's goal of scoring 70 points in the 2020

index. Under the 2015 National Anti-Corruption Program, the country was supposed to score at least 65 points in 2019.

Meanwhile, Latvia's position in the Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) somewhat last year, the organization informed.

In 2019, Latvia scored 56 points on a scale of 100 points, where 0 means that corruption in the given country is rife and 100 that there is no perceived corruption.

In the 2018 index, Latvia ranked 41st among 180 countries with 58 points.

In the latest index, Latvia shares 44th-47th position with Costa Rica, the Czech Republic and Georgia.

Like in previous years, Latvia has been ranked lower in the Corruption Perceptions Index than Estonia and Lithuania.

Estonia shares 18th-19th place with Ireland. Both Lithuania and Estonia have climbed one position in the index.

At the top of the rankings are Denmark and New Zealand. They share 1st-2nd place.

Somalia, South Sudan, Syria and Yemen are at the bottom of the list as the most corrupt countries in the world.

Foreign companies pay largest wages in Lithuania



BNS/TBT Staff

Foreign capital companies paid the largest average wages in Lithuania in 2018 and their employees earned 1,662 euros before tax on average, 52 percent more than the country's average of 1,093 euros, a review by the Lithuanian Government Strategic Analysis Center (STRATA) shows.

Gintautas Jakstas, head of the center's higher education policy and career analysis unit, says the difference in wages between local and foreign capital companies was due to fast expansion of foreign companies that need more workforce and

are, therefore, ready to pay more.

"Higher wages can be partly explained with market and competition conditions that differ in major cities and regions. Even in fairly traditional sectors, like construction, foreign employers pay almost 60 percent more," Jakstas said. Exporting and innovative companies also stand out with above-average wages as their average pay in November, 2018 stood at 1,359 and 1,560 respectively, 8 and 13 percent more than a year ago.

The surveyed companies made around 16 percent of all companies operating in Lithuania in 2018.

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Estonia: Workland opens co-working centers in Riga, Vilnius with EUR 2 mn

LETA/BNS/TBT Staff

Workland, a company offering fully serviced shared office spaces, opened two new co-working centers in Riga and Vilnius this week after investing approximately a million euros in both centers.

There are altogether 335 working spaces in the two new centers. By now, Workland has opened 10 centers across the Baltics, the company said.

Workland founder and management board chair Indrek Haal said that the popularity of co-working centers will continue to grow in Estonia and other countries as both large and small companies have become more flexible -- organizations are growing and changing, which places additional expectations on office space.

The company invested nearly one million euros to open the new Workland Telegraph co-working center opened in the Old Town of Riga on Thursday. In addition to a co-working area, the center has a number of private offices, meeting rooms, a multifunctional space for organizing events, and break areas. The center has working spaces for 175 people.

Some one million euros was also invested in Workland Quadrum, opened in Vilnius on Wednesday. The co-working center has 160



working spaces in the open office area and private offices and is equipped with meeting rooms, break areas, a terrace, kitchen and other facilities necessary for work.

It is estimated that by 2022, around five million people worldwide will be working in co-working centers instead of regular offices. In the Baltics, the number of people working in co-working centers will almost double, reaching 11,000 jobs in a few years, which is why Workland is focused on expanding existing centers and building new ones.

"In addition to the Telegraph and Vilnius centers, we will soon open the most diverse center in Kaunas," Haal said.

Workland is a full-service business center and co-working space operator founded in 2016 and currently has 10 centers, three of which -- Hobujaama, Vabaduse and Maakri -- are in Tallinn, two in Riga, three in Vilnius and two in Kaunas.

Workland's largest shareholder is investment firm BaltCap along with the company's founder and executive management.

Estonia must recover incompatible aid from agricultural company Tartu Agro

BNS/TBT Staff

The European Commission has found that agricultural company AS Tartu Agro received incompatible aid from Estonia and the state must now recover this illegal aid, approximately 1.2 million euros, from the company.

According to the European Commission, Tartu Agro received incompatible aid from Estonia through the rent of agricultural land at a rate below market price and Estonia must now recover this illegal aid from AS Tartu Agro. Estonia will now determine the amount to be recovered, in line with the methodology set out under the European Commission's decision.

In 2017, following a complaint by a competitor, the European Commission opened an in-depth investigation to establish whether a land lease contract between the Estonian Ministry of Rural Affairs and AS Tartu Agro was in line with EU state aid rules. The lease contract had been signed in 2000 between the Estonian Ministry of Rural Affairs and AS Tartu Agro for a duration of 25 years and is therefore still valid.

The European Commission's investigation revealed that the lease of land involved state aid, as the lease fee paid by AS Tartu Agro was, and still is, below the market price. On this basis, the European



Commission found that the lease contract gives an undue and selective advantage to AS Tartu Agro over its competitors.

The European Commission therefore concluded that the contract amounts to incompatible aid under

EU state aid rules, and that AS Tartu Agro now has to return the illegal advantage received. The amount is estimated to be around 1.2 million euros.

AS Tartu Agro is an Estonian private company, which produces milk, meat and cereals.



DISCOVER VILNIUS, TALLINN AND RIGA,
THE GEMS OF THE BALTICS WITH *THE BALTIC TIMES*

Employers more cautious about creation of new jobs this year



LETA/TBT Staff

Demand for labor will remain high this year, but slowing economic growth and increasing problems with labor availability will make employers more cautious about creation of new jobs, according to an annual survey of entrepreneurs by CV-Online Latvia.

33 percent of employers are planning to hire new workers this year, which is 15 percent less than a year ago. In turn, the number of companies that will both hire and dismiss employees has slightly increased -- 31 percent of employers surveyed said so. In contrast, 23 percent of employers are planning neither this year, which is 6 percent more than in 2019.

Of the new jobs to be created this year, almost 40 percent will be for specialists, 19 percent for man-

agers, 15 percent for skilled workers, 10 percent for employees in trade and services sector as well as for unskilled workers.

More than half of companies intending to hire new employees say this is part of their expansion plans, while one-fourth say this is because of staff turnover.

Much like last year, more than 70 percent of employers acknowledged this year that there were increasing problems with labor availability. One of the solutions is hiring employees from third countries, which was mentioned by almost every fourth employer or 24 percent of those surveyed.

CV-Online Latvia survey also found that 45 percent of employers were planning to raise salaries for at least some employees this year. Last year, 51 percent of employers said so.

Lithuanian President's aide: Japan interested in Lithuanian projects



The Japan Bank for International Cooperation (JBIC) is interested in providing financing for the Rail Baltica European-gauge railway project and the Baltic power grids' synchronisation with the Western European

system, an advisor to Lithuanian President Gitanas Nausėda said on January 23. Nausėda and JBIC Governor Tadahito Maeda discussed such possibilities during their meeting in Davos, according to Simonas Krepsa.

VTEK: Lithuanian transport minister breached law

Lithuania's Transport Minister Jaroslav Narkevicius breached the law by allowing enterprises under his ministry's control to pay for his lunch, the Chief Official Ethics

Commission (VTEK) ruled on January 22. Narkevicius says the violation is minor and will consider contesting the ethics watchdog's decision in court.

Turkish company appeal Kaunas decision

Turkish construction company Kayi Insaat has appealed against the decision by the authorities of Kaunas, Lithuania's second-largest city, to terminate its contract on the construction of the Darius and Girėnas Stadium. According

to the municipality, the Turkish company had promised to bring 400 workers and a majority of construction equipment but has no such workforce so far and has rented equipment from Lithuanian subcontractors.



Sergeij GURIEV

Vladimir Putin may be setting himself up to remain Russia's leader well beyond the end of his presidency, to no one's surprise. In his annual state-of-the-nation speech earlier this week, he laid out a roadmap for overhauling Russia's political institutions, implying a major constitutional shakeup. The entire cabinet, led by Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev, immediately resigned.

Putin's proposals were vague and at times self-contradictory. But they provide valuable insights into his plans for after 2024, when his second consecutive term – and legally his final one – ends. For starters, Putin would shift powers from the president to the State Duma (the parliament), and transfer substantial, as-yet-undefined powers to a Putin-led State Council (not mentioned in the Constitution) and Security Council (mentioned but not described in the Constitution).

Other proposed changes include the suppression of constitutional checks and balances, the virtual elimination of judicial independence, the loss of autonomy for municipal governments, and the priority of Russian legislation over international obligations. The Russian Constitution is very clear that only a Constitutional Assembly may change these foundational principles of Russia's political system. Putin said that he would not convene one. In this sense, his speech laid out an open and transparent plan for a coup, or, more precisely, what political scientists call a self-coup, or autogolpe – once a favorite tool of Latin American caudillos.

In fact, this coup is a non-event: the dramatic overhaul of political institutions implies no change in Russia's political regime. By definition, a political regime is a set of rules, formal or informal, that determine the selection of leaders and policies. Before the coup, Putin was in charge of both. Af-

Lithuania's Supreme Court takes on ex-MP's sexual harassment case



The Lithuanian Supreme Court (LAT) started on January 22 hearing a case in which former Lithuanian MP Kestutis Pukas was charged with sexual harassment. Lower-instance courts found Pukas guilty

Putin's meaningless coup



Putin seems to have thought of everything. But the fact that he finds it necessary to go to such lengths to protect himself and his potential successor reveals how tenuous his position is. His famously high approval rating now stood at a paltry (for him) 64% in December 2019. A loyalist successor would be unlikely to reach anywhere close to that level.

ter the coup, this is still the case, and he plans to keep it that way. As Vyacheslav Volodin, Chairman of the State Duma, put it in 2014 (when he was Putin's deputy chief of staff), "There is Putin; there is Russia. No Putin – no Russia."

Of course, the country will outlast the man. Volodin was referring to the Russian political regime, which Putin created in his own image. That regime may eventually be reshaped, but probably not until after Putin is out of power.

Whether Putin will be forced from power hasn't been a serious question in a long time. Some may have thought (or hoped) that he would choose to retire in 2024.

The message of Vladimir Putin's call in his recent state-of-the-nation speech for a constitutional overhaul is not that the Russian regime is going to be transformed; it isn't. Rather, the message is that Putin knows his regime is on the wrong side of history – and he is dead set on keeping it there.

Schengen, national visa fees to go up in Lithuania

The Lithuanian government on January 22 backed the increase of fees for obtaining Schengen and national visas. The consular fee for processing national visas applications will double from 60 to 120 euros. The decision was made taking into account the time a consular officer needs to accept and process applications for national visas, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs said after submitting the bills. The Lithuanian government also decided to increase the Schengen visa fee from 60 to 80 euros.

of sexually harassing a woman who worked as his assistant when he was an MP, but acquitted him on charges of harassment against three other young women who sought the job of secretary-assistant.

Lithuania's new NATO ambassador



Lithuania's government on January 22 backed the appointment of Deputy Government Chancellor Deividas Matulionis as Lithuania's permanent representative to NATO.

foreign citizenship or residence permits. Whoever Putin is attempting to target with this rule – perhaps opposition leader Mikhail Khodorkovsky, who left Russia in 2013 – apparently poses too great a threat to his preferred successor.

The proposal to eliminate the primacy of international laws, agreements, and the decisions of international bodies in Russia seems to advance similar ends. The European Court of Human Rights regularly overturns the Putin-controlled judiciary's criminal convictions of another popular opposition figure, Alexei Navalny.

In order to stave off resistance to this power play, Putin also announced an increase in annual social spending of about 0.5% of GDP. And he replaced the deeply unpopular Medvedev with a highly competent but low-profile technocrat, Mikhail Mishustin, who was previously in charge of tax administration.

Like Putin's other "non-political" prime ministers – Mikhail Fradkov (2004-07) and Viktor Zubkov (2007-08) – Mishustin conveniently lacks the charisma to challenge him. And while Mishustin is respected for streamlining and digitizing the tax system, his popularity is tempered by the fact that tax collection increased dramatically under his leadership.

Putin seems to have thought of everything. But the fact that he finds it necessary to go to such lengths to protect himself and his potential successor reveals how tenuous his position is. His famously high approval rating now stood at a paltry (for him) 64% in December 2019. A loyalist successor would be unlikely to reach anywhere close to that level.

So, the message of Putin's recent speech is not that the Russian regime is going to be transformed. It isn't – as financial markets, which didn't budge, seem to recognize. Rather, the message is that Putin knows his regime is on the wrong side of history – and he is dead set on keeping it there.

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The commentary is republished from www.project-syndicate.org



Daron ACEMOGLU

White nationalism is on the rise in the United States. According to the Anti-Defamation League, there were 6,768 incidents of extremism and anti-Semitism (mostly from the right) in the US in 2018 and 2019. That figure is significantly higher than in previous years, leading many to conclude that President Donald Trump is to blame for the uptick in domestic extremism.

Since the launch of his presidential campaign in 2015, Trump has overtly and covertly encouraged violence by his supporters. After a white supremacist, James Alex Fields Jr., drove his car into counterprotesters in Charlottesville, Virginia, killing one and injuring dozens, Trump infamously said that there were "some very fine people on both sides." And he has not shied away from racist rhetoric when describing African countries and even non-white members of Congress.

Trump's words have consequences. In addition to the Charlottesville killer, several other high-profile white nationalists who have carried out acts of violence or domestic terrorism have said that they were inspired by the president. These include Cesar Sayoc Jr., who mailed pipe bombs to prominent Democrats, including former President Barack Obama and Trump's 2016 opponent, Hillary Clinton; Robert Bowers, who killed 11 people in a Pittsburgh synagogue; and Patrick Crusius, who gunned down 22 people in El Paso. New research by economists Karsten Müller of Princeton University and Carlo Schwarz of Warwick University draws a direct causal link between Trump's anti-Muslim tweets and anti-Muslim hate crimes.

Owing to Trump's propensity to foment violence and distort the truth, many have concluded that he is a fascist. Most ominously, Trump seeks to delegitimize democratic

LETA/TBT Staff

Latvia's goal is to remain the Baltic leader by port cargo turnover, Transport Minister Talis Linkaits (New Conservative Party, JKP) told journalists on January 23.

The minister indicated that the Latvian ports reloaded 62.379 million tons of cargo in 2019, which is more than in the two other Baltic states. "Latvia is still the leader in terms of cargo. Our goal and ambition is to keep that position," the transport minister said.

Linkaits said that historically, Latvian ports have been handling cargo from Russia but that Russia is now diverting cargo to its own ports. "We have been preparing for that, and this is not something characteristic of this year alone. Our goal is adapt to this transit and transportation chain, so that the

Is America going fascist?



Given US President Donald Trump's propensity for racist, divisive rhetoric, it is easy to see why so many of his opponents would describe him as a modern-day Benito Mussolini or Adolf Hitler. But by implying that all Trump supporters are irredeemable extremists, such rhetoric merely plays into his hands.

institutions and impartial bureaucratic procedures, not only to insulate his and his family's dubious business dealings, but as a strategy to increase his personal power and authority. Italian fascists and the Nazis routinely used similar strategies from the 1920s onward.1

But it would be a mistake to exaggerate these similarities. For starters, interwar fascism cannot be understood without the foil of communism, which many middle-class Germans and Italians considered an existential threat. There is

no such threat today. Obama's election as America's first black president did reinforce extremists' fears that America's white population is being "replaced." But such conspiracy theories cannot be compared to the real-world threat posed by communism following Russia's Bolshevik revolution in 1917.

Second, in the post-World War I era, traumatized, disillusioned, and battle-hardened young men comprised a significant share of many countries' population. While many veterans of Iraq and Afghanistan

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Latvia aims to remain Baltic leader by port cargo turnover

Latvian transit corridor remained attractive to the forwarders and recipients of cargo," Linkaits said.

The minister said he had a meeting with representatives of Latvia's large ports to discuss future plans. "There is confidence that cargo volumes will be approximately as large as planned. So there is and will be work to do at the ports," Linkaits said.

The minister admitted that the events of the past month when the government took control over the

freeports of Riga and Ventspils have prompted certain questions from the entrepreneurs doing business in the ports' territory. "It is in our interests that entrepreneurs are not affected by the changes and that the ports continue to operate, develop and prosper," Linkaits said.

The cargo turnover of all three large Latvian ports is still high enough, Linkaits said. "Due to the market situation, we see some groups of cargo reducing because of objective reasons, for instance, coal trade

have suffered similar traumas (and some are staunch Trump supporters), they command neither the numbers nor the political influence that their interwar counterparts did.

Third, despite his rhetoric and attempts to enlist the help of other countries in his re-election campaign, Trump has not yet tried to consolidate his power by non-electoral means. That could change if he loses to the Democratic challenger in November. But even then, it would be a far cry from past fascists' systematic undermining of democratic processes.

Lastly, while the Republican Party's unconditional support for Trump is eerily similar to the behavior of center-right politicians who backed Benito Mussolini and Adolf Hitler, there is nothing uniquely fascist about unprincipled politicians behaving dishonorably.

This is important, because it really does matter whether one calls Trump a fascist, as opposed to applying some other label. To be sure, a second Trump term would represent an existential crisis for American institutions. The forces that have hampered his agenda – most critically, mobilized citizens – would become less powerful as his rule became further normalized. Political conventions would be even more radically undermined than in Trump's first term. The administration's ongoing effort to abolish impartial expertise from the bureaucracy would continue unabated. The political system, including the judiciary, could become irreparably polarized.

But partisan polarization and the decimation of any middle ground for compromise are key weapons in Trump's own war against the institutions that are meant to keep him in check. Those who brand him and his supporters as fascists are merely deepening the divide, and delegitimizing the (often valid) grievances of millions of Americans, most of whom have nothing to do with white nationalism or extremism.

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The commentary is republished from www.project-syndicate.org

Lithuanian Poles' party leader exasperated

MEP Valdemar Tomasevski, the leader of the Electoral Action of Poles in Lithuania-Christian Families Alliance (EAPL-CFA), described on January 23 the opposition's impeachment initiative against MP Irina Rozova as a political move aimed at sowing divisions within the ruling bloc. Opposition members of the parliament's Committee on National Security and Defence (CNSD) initiated impeachment proceedings against Rozova, a member of the EAPL-CFA political group in the Seimas, over her allegedly concealed ties with Russian diplomats.



Brahma CHELLANEY

“Great nations do not fight endless wars.” US President Donald Trump declared in his 2019 State of the Union speech. He had a point: military entanglements in the Middle East have contributed to the relative decline of American power and facilitated China’s muscular rise. And yet, less than a year after that speech, Trump ordered the assassination of Iran’s most powerful military commander, General Qassem Suleimani, bringing the United States to the precipice of yet another war. Such is the power of America’s addiction to interfering in the chronically volatile Middle East.

The US no longer has vital interests at stake in the Middle East. Shale oil and gas have made the US energy independent, so safeguarding Middle Eastern oil supplies is no longer a strategic imperative. In fact, the US has been supplanting Iran as an important source of crude oil and petroleum products for India, the world’s third-largest oil consumer after America and China. Moreover, Israel, which has become the region’s leading military power (and its only nuclear-armed state), no longer depends on vigilant US protection.

The US does, however, have a vital interest in resisting China’s efforts to challenge international norms, including through territorial and maritime revisionism. That is why Trump’s predecessor, Barack Obama, promised a “pivot to Asia” early in his presidency.

But Obama failed to follow through on his plans to shift America’s foreign-policy focus from the Middle East. On the contrary, the Nobel Peace Prize laureate staged military campaigns everywhere from Syria and Iraq to Somalia and Yemen. In Libya, his administration sowed chaos by overthrowing strongman Muammar el-Qaddafi in 2011. In Egypt, Obama hailed Presi-

Latvian Public Broadcasting TBT Staff

“The joint stock company AS Meridian Trade Bank has changed its name to Industra Bank (Industra). The new name reflects a change in the bank’s business strategy, following which the bank will be further on focusing on the cooperation with small and middle-sized companies in Latvia and other Baltic States and on the provision of services necessary for a successful business development to these companies,” the bank said in a statement.

The brand Industra is planned to be phased in gradually over the year and customers of the bank are not required to perform any additional actions.

“Industra is a bank for businessmen operating in the real economy



US President Donald Trump once seemed to recognize that, as long as the US remains mired in endless wars in the Middle East, it will be unable to address in a meaningful way the threat China poses. But that has not stopped him from perpetuating the cycle of self-defeating American interventionism in the Middle East.

dent Hosni Mubarak’s 2011 ouster.

Yet in 2013, when the military toppled Mubarak’s democratically elected successor, Mohamed Morsi, Obama opted for non-intervention, refusing to acknowledge it as a coup, and suspended US aid only briefly. This reflected the Obama administration’s habit of selective non-intervention – the approach that encouraged China, America’s main long-term rival, to become more aggressive in pursuit of its claims in the South China Sea, including building and militarizing seven artificial islands.

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The US no longer has vital interests at stake in the Middle East. Shale oil and gas have made the US energy independent, so safeguarding Middle Eastern oil supplies is no longer a strategic imperative.



– for manufacturers, service providers, people who put their business ideas into practice. The name of Industra embodies this ambitious goal – to provide a true business partnership to support entrepreneur activities which through

Trump was supposed to change this. He has repeatedly derided US military interventions in the Middle East as a colossal waste of money, claiming the US has spent \$7 trillion since the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. (Brown University’s Costs of War Project puts the figure at \$6.4 trillion.) “We have nothing – nothing except death and destruction. It’s a horrible thing,” Trump said in 2018.

Furthermore, the Trump administration’s national-security strategy recognizes China as a “strategic competitor” – a label that it subse-

quently replaced with the far blunter “enemy.” And it has laid out a strategy for curbing Chinese aggression and creating a “free and open” Indo-Pacific region stretching “from Bollywood to Hollywood.”

Yet, as is so often the case, Trump’s actions have directly contradicted his words. Despite his anti-war rhetoric, Trump appointed war-mongering aides like Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, who has been described as a “hawk brimming with bravado and ambition,” and former National Security Adviser John Bolton, who in 2015 wrote an op-ed called “To Stop Iran’s Bomb, Bomb Iran.”

Perhaps it should be no surprise, then, that Trump has pursued a needlessly antagonistic approach to Iran. The escalation began early in his presidency, when he withdrew the US from the 2015 Iran nuclear deal (which Iran had not violated), re-imposed sanctions, and pressured America’s allies to follow suit. Furthermore, since last May, Trump has deployed 16,500 additional troops to the Middle East and sent an aircraft-carrier strike group to the Persian Gulf, instead of the South China Sea. The assassination of Suleimani was part of this pattern.

Like virtually all of America’s past interventions in the Middle East, its Iran policy has been spectacularly counterproductive. Iran has announced that it will disregard the nuclear agreement’s uranium-enrichment limits. Trump’s sanctions have increased the oil-import bill of US allies like India and deepened Iran’s ties with China, which has continued to import Iranian oil through private companies and invest billions of dollars in Iran’s oil, gas, and petrochemical sectors.

Beyond Iran, Trump has failed to extricate the US from Afghanistan, Syria, or Yemen. His administration has continued to support the Saudi-led bombing campaign against Yemen’s Houthi rebels with US military raids and sorties. As a result, Yemen is enduring the world’s worst humanitarian crisis.

Trump did order troops to leave Syria last October, but with so little strategic planning that the Kurds – America’s most loyal ally in the fight against the Islamic State (ISIS) – were left exposed to an attack from Turkey. This, together with his effort to strike a Faustian bargain with the Afghan Taliban (which is responsible for the world’s deadliest terrorist attacks), threatens to reverse his sole achievement in the Middle East: dramatically diminishing ISIS’s territorial holdings.

Making matters worse, after ordering the Syrian drawdown, Trump approved a military mission to secure the country’s oil fields. The enduring oil fixation also led Trump last April to endorse Libyan warlord Khalifa Haftar, just as Haftar began laying siege to the capital, Tripoli.

The Trump administration is unlikely to change course any time soon. In fact, it has now redefined the Indo-Pacific region as extending “from California to Kilimanjaro,” thus specifically including the Persian Gulf. With this change, the Trump administration is attempting to uphold the pretense that its interventions in the Middle East serve US foreign-policy goals, even when they undermine those goals.

As long as the US remains mired in “endless wars” in the Middle East, it will be unable to address in a meaningful way the threat China poses. Trump was supposed to know this. And yet, his administration’s commitment to a free and open Indo-Pacific seems likely to lose credibility, while the cycle of self-defeating American interventionism in the Middle East appears set to continue.

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Latvian bank MTB rebrands itself 'Industra Bank'

streamlining our business model, work on strengthening the Bank’s first-tier capital is also currently in its final stage,” added Adamovičs.

It is not the first time the bank has changed its name in search of a new start. Originally named Multibanka it was renamed SMP Bank in 2006 when it was bought by the Russian bank of the same name, it changed its name to Meridian Trade Bank in 2014 after Russia’s SMP sold its stake in the company to a group of Latvia-resident individuals when SMP was added to the U.S. sanctions list.

Meridian was fined 455,000 euros in 2018 for failures in its anti money-laundering systems and

889,000 euros in 2017 for inadequate internal control functions in the area of credit risk management. It was also fined 14,200 euros in 2018 for failure to submit and publish an audited annual report.

LTV’s De Facto investigative show reported on Meridian Trade Bank a couple of years ago.

The bank has 13 customer centres in Latvia and three customer centres in Lithuania. It claims to have more than 30 thousand customers and at the end of the third quarter of 2019, the consolidated assets of the Bank’s Group were 173 million euros, while the earnings for the three quarters of 2019 amounted to 423,000 euros.

Arvind SUBRAMANIAN
Josh FELMAN

We have suddenly arrived at a tricky stage in global economic development. Emerging markets are losing their dynamism, after a remarkable three-decade-long run during which they caught up rapidly with advanced economies. Moreover, rekindling this vigor requires a new economic strategy. But where will such a model come from, and who will provide the intellectual leadership?

The latest economic forecasts from the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank are sobering, pointing to protracted slowdowns across the board in China, India, Sub-Saharan Africa, and Latin America. Of course, alarmism about the “end of growth” might be as overblown as past hype about emerging markets’ unstoppable rise. But policymakers in developing countries are genuinely concerned and are grappling with how to revive flagging dynamism.

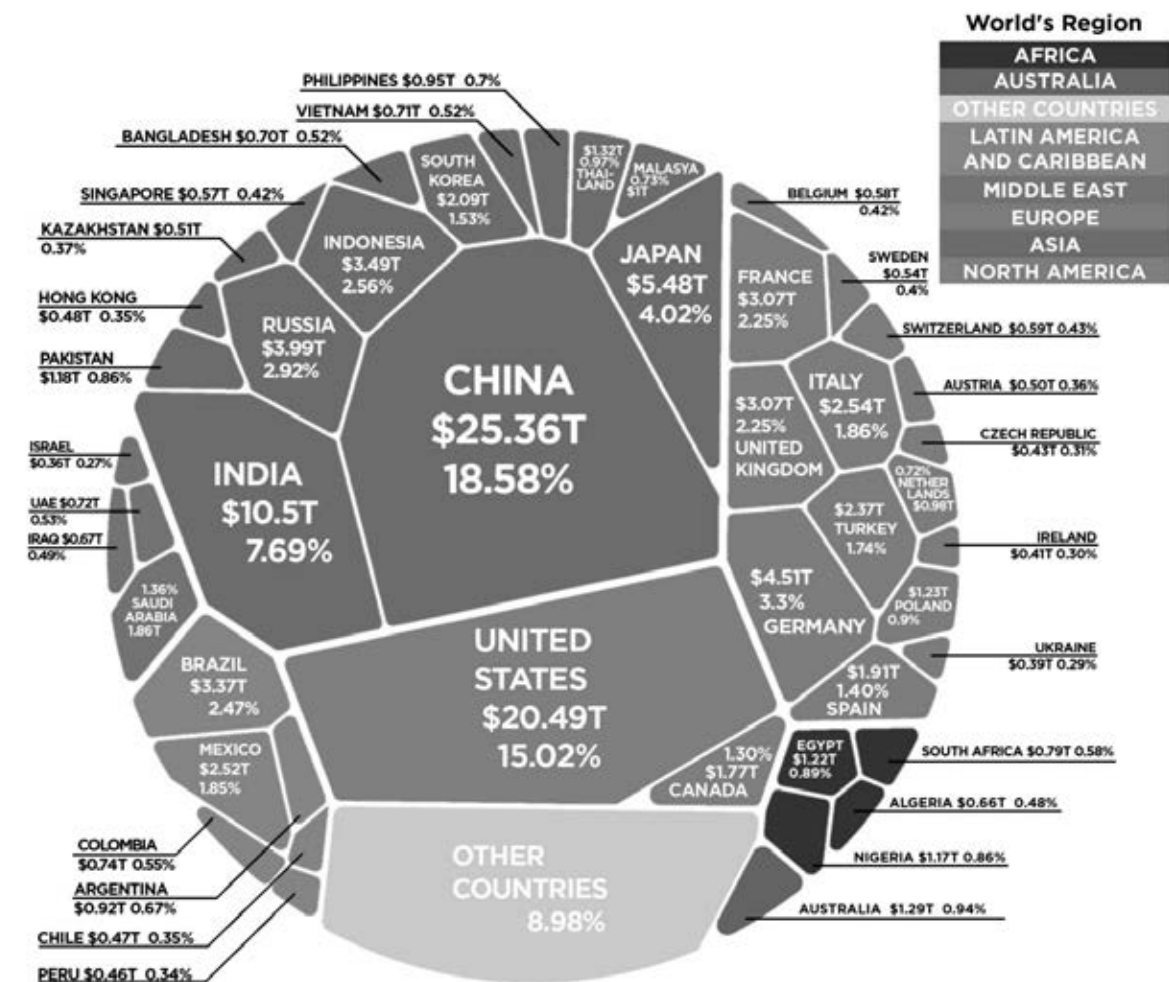
In the past, governments had a ready intellectual solution: the so-called Washington Consensus, a term coined by John Williamson of the Peterson Institute for International Economics, which advocated a broad strategy of macroeconomic stabilization, privatization, deregulation, and globalization.

Some questioned whether and to what extent the strategy worked. But the fact is, there was a template – created by leading Western academic and policy institutions – that was seen as useful by developing-country policymakers. And the high noon of the Washington Consensus coincided with developing countries’ strong performance.

Two of the current strands of thought that might replace the Washington Consensus also originated in the West. The first represents a reaction against the neoliberal approach and is motivated by several disturbing long-run trends: weak growth, rising inequality, an increasingly beleaguered middle class, and collapsing social mobility.

This emerging post-neoliberal consensus questions the primacy accorded to markets. It advocates a larger role for the state, both to generate better market outcomes (for example, via minimum-wage

The next big development challenge



New strategies for reviving growth in emerging markets will have to be indigenous, rather than coming from Western institutions. But where will such strategies come from, and who will provide the intellectual leadership?

increases and stricter enforcement of antitrust policies) and to correct inequitable outcomes via aggressive redistributive policies. This approach also calls for more proactive fiscal and monetary policy in the short run.

The second strand of thought is associated with Abhijit Banerjee and Esther Duflo, both winners of the 2019 Nobel Prize in Economics. Banerjee and Duflo argue that economic growth is not really influenced by policy changes, or at least not in ways for which we have strong evidence. They therefore advocate a strategy of “going small”: focusing on measures, such as distributing free malaria bed nets and deworming children, that clearly seem to be effective and will produce localized benefits.

But it is not obvious that either approach is of much help to developing countries. The post-neoliberal consensus almost entirely reflects concerns in advanced economies: secular stagnation and unconventional monetary policies are not high-priority problems for governments in poorer countries. Moreover, emerging markets are still growing, not stagnating. And even inequality, which is a common concern, takes a very different form, and requires very different solutions, in developing economies.

Perhaps the biggest drawback of the post-neoliberal approach is the

dichotomy that it poses – or, perhaps, presupposes – between states and markets. The reality in developing countries is that both states and markets are weak – the very definition of underdevelopment. So, a policy agenda that focuses on increasing the role of the state may well be unrealistic.

In addition, climate change is a new and critical aspect of the post-neoliberal consensus that is likely to prove increasingly problematic. On one hand, the overwhelming scientific evidence of global warming is a clarion call to action. On the other hand, policies aimed at promoting rapid decarbonization raise deep concerns in developing countries, because such measures

could easily clash with the needs of their energy-deprived citizens.

Similarly, many developing-country policymakers simply cannot afford the luxury of a narrow agenda, making them unlikely to take seriously any advice to focus on the “small and certain.” They have no choice but to strive to achieve rapid growth, which has been a prerequisite for all successful development transitions. Moreover, the experience of the 1980s and 1990s shows that this objective is not a chimera, and that growth can indeed be increased by appropriate policy reforms.

Mahatma Gandhi famously said: “I do not want my house to be walled in on all sides and my windows to

be stuffed. I want the culture of all lands to be blown about my house as freely as possible. But I refuse to be blown off my feet by any.” Do developing countries today have the capacity not to be blown off course? Do policymakers have the intellectual and cognitive wherewithal to absorb and assess the new thinking on economic development, adopting what is appropriate to their situation and rejecting what is not? And do they have their own new ways of thinking about the development challenge?

Consider the situation in the two largest developing countries, China and India. China has the intellectual capacity, but is facing the breakdown of its economic model. Chinese policymakers now need to find another approach that both encourages growth and ensures that the Communist Party of China remains in control – all the while preventing the extraordinary build-up of debt from triggering a crisis. It’s not obvious to anyone how they can do this.

Meanwhile, India’s current inward economic turn appears to reflect a broader inclination to be walled in and prevent foreign winds from blowing freely. And this intellectual nativism seems to be more about harnessing technical expertise for political objectives than about valuing it for its own sake.

What is clear is that solutions to the new growth and development challenges in emerging markets will have to be indigenous, rather than coming from Western institutions. Building and maintaining among national policymakers the sort of open, self-confident intellectual capacity that Gandhi espoused could well be the next development challenge.

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Vejonis voted in as new president of Latvian Basketball Association

LETA/TBT Staff

Former Latvian President Raimonds Vejonis has been voted in as the new president of the Latvian Basketball Association (LBS).

Vejonis has been elected to a four-year term. During January 23 meeting of LBS members, Vejonis received 34 votes, while his opponent, former Latvian women’s basketball team captain Anete Jekabsone-Zogota, received 14 votes.

Meanwhile, the third candidate, former Latvian national team player Kaspars Cipruss, recalled his candidacy before today’s vote in favor of Vejonis.

“This support is definitely an advance. As I said in the run-up to the election, my goal is to work with you [LBS members]. I will keep these promises. Both myself and the board members must be open to ideas in order to make decisions aimed at the long-term

development of Latvian basketball. There is a need for change and improvement,” Vejonis said before the vote.

At the annual LBS meeting on November 14, the organization’s head Valdis Voins said that the next meeting should be held in January 2020, and the president and council should be elected for a period of four years. Voins has been the organization’s president for two terms and said he will not run for another term.

Putin keen to strengthen ties with former Soviet republics



Kester KENN KLOMEGAH

Russian President Vladimir Putin is keen to deepen and strengthen relations with the former Soviet republics, particularly those which initially formed the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) and joined the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) after the breakup in 1991. Russia was internationally recognized as the successor state to the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics out of which 15 sovereign states emerged and re-emerged.

The three Baltic states – Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania – were the first to declare their independence, between March and May 1990, claiming continuity from the original states that existed prior to their annexation by the Soviet Union in 1940. The remaining 12 republics all subsequently seceded.

In warm messages to the leaders of the republics on the eve of the New Year 2020, he stressed collective efforts at strengthening regional cooperation, maintaining security and developing a regional sustainable economy – with most of the 15 sovereign states that emerged and re-emerged from the dissolution of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) in 1991.

In his message to President of the Republic of Abkhazia Raul Khadjimba, Putin noted the dynamic development of Russian-Abkhazian relations based on the principles of alliance and strategic partnership and expressed confidence that they would further build up mutually beneficial cooperation in various fields.

The Russian leader also extended New Year greetings to Armenian President Armen Sarkissian and Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan, pointing out that relations



Post-Soviet states in English alphabetical order: Armenia Azerbaijan Belarus, Estonia, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Latvia, Lithuania, Moldova, Russia, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Ukraine, Uzbekistan.

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with Armenia, based on centuries-old traditions of fraternal friendship and mutual respect, are highly valued in Russia. He noted that the further development of our allied ties, constructive bilateral cooperation in all spheres, and partnership in Eurasian integration processes meet the fundamental interests of the peoples of the two states and contribute to ensuring regional security and stability.

In his greetings addressed to President of the Republic of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev, he emphasized the high level of Russian-Azerbaijani relations and expressed confidence that Russia and Azerbaijan would jointly ensure the further development of their strategic

partnership and constructive interaction, which fully meets the interests of both nations, and contributes to strengthening security and stability in the South Caucasus

The President of Russia sent holiday greetings to President of the Republic of Belarus Alexander Lukashenko. The message highlights that a significant anniversary was marked in 2019 – the 20th anniversary of the signing of the Treaty establishing the Union State of Russia and Belarus, a supranational union consisting of the Russian Federation and the Republic of Belarus.

Russia and Belarus have been able to do a lot to develop the entire range of bilateral ties and implement joint projects in various

fields, he said. The Russian leader expressed hope for the continuation of a substantive dialogue and constructive joint work in the coming year to develop the bilateral strategic partnership and promote mutually beneficial integration processes.

In his message to President of Kazakhstan Kassym-Jomart Tokayev, Putin noted the important fact that the two countries have not only fully preserved the accumulated potential of Russian-Kazakh relations, but also continue joint efforts to strengthen their strategic partnership, alliance and neighbourly contacts. According to the Russian President, the coordination of efforts between Moscow and Nur-Sultan as part of the Eurasian Economic Union, CSTO, and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and other multilateral platforms has been very rewarding. Vladimir Putin expressed confidence that in the coming year, interaction between the two states would continue to develop even further.

In his New Year message to President of Kyrgyzstan Sooronbay Jeenbekov, Putin noted the progress in strengthening the Russian-Kyrgyz strategic partnership and alliance and expressed confidence that Russia and Kyrgyzstan would continue close mutually beneficial cooperation in all areas in 2020, which has been declared a cross-year between our two countries.

In his message of greetings to President of Moldova Igor Dodon, the Russian President highlighted the long-standing bonds of friendship and spiritual closeness between Russia and Moldova and expressed confidence that the development of constructive bilateral dialogue and cooperation in various fields meets the common interests of the two countries.

In his New Year greetings to President of the Republic of South Ossetia Anatoly Bibilov, Putin noted that many projects have been implemented recently that have promoted South Ossetia's socioeconomic development and statehood, and expressed hope for continued joint work to build up bilateral cooperation on various tracks in 2020.

His greetings to President of Tajikistan Emomali Rahmon highlighted the intensive development of strategic partnership and alliance between Russia and Tajikistan. Putin expressed confidence that the implementation of agreements achieved during Emomali Rahmon's visit to Moscow in April will serve to further build up bilateral cooperation in all areas, as well as constructive interaction towards ensuring regional security and stability.

The President of Russia extended his New Year greetings to President of Turkmenistan Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov, noting with satisfaction the dynamic development of the dialogue between Russia and Turkmenistan, and their constructive trade, economic, energy, and humanitarian cooperation.

Putin emphasized that Turkmenistan's successful chairmanship of the CIS has contributed to greater effectiveness of multilateral cooperation mechanisms within the CIS. The Russian leader expressed confidence that productive joint work to strengthen the two countries' strategic partnership would continue in the coming year.

Addressing President of Uzbekistan Shavkat Mirziyoyev, the Russian President noted with satisfaction the progressive development of the strategic partnership and alliance between Russia and Uzbekistan. He noted that the two states have recently accomplished a lot to expand their mutually beneficial bilateral ties in the political, trade, economic, energy, humanitarian and many other areas. Putin expressed confidence that Shavkat Mirziyoyev's state visit to the Russian Federation in 2020 would help consolidate prior achievements and outline the prospects for further cooperation between the two states.

Kester Kenn Klomegha is an independent researcher and writer on African affairs in the EurAsian region and former Soviet republics. He wrote previously for African Press Agency, African Executive and Inter Press Service. Earlier, he had worked for The Moscow Times, a reputable English newspaper

The commentary first appeared on www.indepthnews.net

Establishment of EU civil protection centre in Vilnius discussed

The Lithuanian government on January 22 endorsed plans for the country to submit an application for the establishment of a regional EU civil protection centre in the country that would cover the

Nordic and Baltic countries. Lithuanian will try to convince the EU of the necessity of such a centre in the country as Belarus is getting ready for the launch of the Astravyets nuclear power plant.



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Vladimir KARA-MURZA

Dictatorships and term limits rarely go together. It has been clear since at least 2003 — when Vladimir Putin shut down the last independent television network, expelled the pro-democracy opposition from parliament, and jailed one of his main rivals — that he intends to stay in power for as long as he stays alive.

In 2008, at the end of his second term, Putin easily got around Article 81 of the Russian constitution, which limits the president to two consecutive terms, by installing Dmitry Medvedev as puppet president — while continuing to wield power from the position of prime minister.

In 2024, when Putin turns 72, such an arrangement will no longer be an option. And so this week, in his annual address to parliament, the Kremlin strongman announced the most sweeping constitutional overhaul in a quarter of a century. “Constitutional coup d’état” would be a more appropriate description, since the proposed changes are aimed at codifying Putin's lifetime rule.

The planned “reform” will significantly weaken the presidency, shifting the power to nominate the prime minister and the cabinet to the State Duma, the lower house of Parliament. At the same time, a hitherto toothless advisory body known as the State Council will get an upgrade to constitutional status, with its powers as yet unspecified. “It's almost certain that Putin will become its chairman,” Alexander Solovye, an opposition politician, told Echo of Moscow radio this week. “So he is setting himself up to be sort of a father of the nation, an ayatollah, a demigod.”

For some time now, the Kremlin has been floating ideas about how best to overcome the “2024 problem.” One scenario involved creating a new state by incorporating Belarus. In the end, though, Putin decided to simply follow the exam-

BNS/TBT Staff

Members of the Riigikogu, the parliament of Estonia, have established a group for ties with the parliament of Croatia and a support group for parents and persons raising a child alone.

The group for Estonia-Croatia interparliamentary ties is chaired by Anneli Ott and its deputy chair is Juri Jaanson, spokespeople for the Riigikogu said on Thursday. The members of the parliamentary group are Marika Tuus-Laul, Na-

Vladimir Putin just staged a constitutional coup. How will Russians react?



In 2008, at the end of his second term, Putin easily got around Article 81 of the Russian constitution, which limits the president to two consecutive terms, by installing Dmitry Medvedev as puppet president — while continuing to wield power from the position of prime minister.

ple of Kazakhstan, where long-time ruler Nursultan Nazarbayev recently vacated the presidency, only to retain control as chairman of the Security Council and leader of the ruling party. In his quest to maintain his personal power, Putin is attempting to transplant the Central Asian model to European soil.

“In the 21st century, Russia is ruled by a backward and ineffective authoritarian system, a system that has no respect for people, no vision for the future, and no moral compass,” wrote Grigory Yavlinsky, the founder of Yabloko, Russia's last remaining major liberal party. “Putin is proposing to not only maintain this system but to make it even more authoritarian and even more closed.”

Along with redistributing executive power, Putin also proposed to abolish the primacy of international law now enshrined in the constitution. As a member of the Council of Europe and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, Russia is bound by international standards on human rights, civil liberties and the rule of law — including democratic elections, protections from arbitrary imprisonment, and freedoms of the media, assembly, and association.

In practice, the Putin regime has long ignored these commitments — even though it is periodically reminded of them by rulings from the European Court of Human Rights. The latest came just a day before Putin's constitutional

announcement, when the court found violations of three articles of the European Convention on Human Rights in the trial of Mikhail Khodorkovsky, the formerly imprisoned and now exiled Putin opponent. By establishing the primacy of domestic statutes, the Kremlin intends to free itself from its remaining formal commitments under international law, signaling yet another milestone in its growing isolation.

The changes are being ushered at a breath-taking pace: Constitutional amendments are due to take effect by May, and there is growing talk of an early parliamentary election this year. The Kremlin is reported to be in the process of creating several fake political parties

The changes are being ushered at a breath-taking pace: Constitutional amendments are due to take effect by May, and there is growing talk of an early parliamentary election this year. The Kremlin is reported to be in the process of creating several fake political parties that would dilute the protest vote, ensuring the continued dominance of the ruling United Russia party despite its falling support.

Group for ties with Croatia, single parents association set up in Estonian parliament

talia Malleus, Tonis Molder, Kalev Kallo, Urve Tiidus, Kalle Laanet, Madis Milling, Kalle Grunthal, Peeter Ernits, Ruuben Kaalep, Tar-mo Kruusimae, Aivar Soerd and Ivarti Padar.

Ott said that Croatia is the president of the Council of the

European Union in the first half of this year.

“At a time when Croatia is under stepped-up attention, this provides an opportunity for developing closer cooperation with the EU member state also bilaterally,” Ott said.

The chair of the support group for parents and persons raising a child alone is Siret Kotka and deputy chair Signe Riisalo. Its members are MPs Riina Sikkut, Helmen Kutt, Oudekki Loone, Marek Jurgenson, Merry Aart and Jaak Valge.

that would dilute the protest vote, ensuring the continued dominance of the ruling United Russia party despite its falling support.

Real opponents, meanwhile, will likely be kept away from the ballot altogether. This week, Russia's Supreme Court suspended the license of a party led by former opposition lawmaker Dmitri Gudkov, while a new draft law flagged in the Duma would allow the government to ban any political party for “undermining the credibility of the state in the international arena.” The document specifically mentions Yabloko and its leaders' supposed “regular contacts” with foreigners, including former U.S. ambassador John Tefft, who is described as a “mastermind of color revolutions.”

There is nothing surprising about the news from Moscow. Putin's intentions have long been apparent; what we learned this week was merely the details. Many young people on social media, appalled by the notion of another generation growing up under one-man rule, responded to the news with gloom.

Yet it is important to remember that the best-laid plans of strongmen do not always translate into reality. The fates of Slobodan Milosevic in Serbia, Viktor Yanukovich in Ukraine, or Serzh Sargsyan in Armenia testify to that.

In recent years, young, urban, educated Russians have been increasingly asserting their opposition to Putin's authoritarian consolidation. The 2011-2012 winter protests, the nationwide anti-corruption rallies in 2017, or last summer's demonstrations against the removal of opposition candidates from local elections all offer cases in point. The only force that can hinder Putin's plans for lifetime rule is organized public resistance from Russian citizens. How strong it will be is now the only real question.

Vladimir Vladimirovich Kara-Murza is a Russian opposition politician. He serves as vice-chairman of Open Russia, a NGO founded by Russian businessman and former oligarch Mikhail Khodorkovsky, which promotes civil society and democracy in Russia. He currently acts as Senior Fellow to the Raoul Wallenberg Centre for Human Rights. He was awarded the Civil Courage Prize in 2018.

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Kotka said that as chair of the group, she aims to offer potential solutions for creating an environment supportive of the development of such families.

“Often such families have more economic, social and psychological problems, and different surveys confirm that with such living model those who are most unhappy are the children,” Kotka said.

The 14th Riigikogu has so far formed altogether 64 parliamentary groups and 66 support groups.

**Latvian Public Broadcasting/
TBT Staff**

The 2019 world of the year candidates include new Latvian words for “scooter”, “like” and “influencer”, as well as new words for several other modern phenomena, according to Riga Latvian Society’s Latvian Language Advancement Group representative Ieva Kolmane.

Many English words, such as “like” have developed new meanings in the age of technology, and the Latvian language is trying to catch up. In the beginning many of the English words go through the ‘Latvian treatment’ with a slightly changed spelling to make it more phonetic and a Latvian ending. That’s how a social media “like” became “laiks” in Latvian, which could be confusing as it’s also the word for time or weather. The suggestion of the language group took the root of the verb “tik”, meaning “to enjoy”, and added an ending (same as the one for thumb) to make it a noun.

One of the nominated words, “valstsgriba”, or “national will”, has been closely associated with President Egils Levits for his use of the word in speeches, and the Latvian word that would possibly replace “influenceris” (“influencer”), “domvedis” (“thought leader”), has also been included in the shortlist. However there are a few arguably strange suggestions, such as calling the “Whatsapp” chat application “vecpaps”, which could also be

Latvian words for “scooter”, “like” and “influencer” up for word of the year



confused for a Latvian version of grandpa or opa.

The “non-word of the year” category includes such Latvian words as “ofiss”, which is used for the English “office” instead of the Latvian words “birojs” or “kantoris”.

The literal translation for “black ice”, “melnais ledus” is also on the shortlist, as the proper Latvian translation is “atkala”. Other candidates include wrongly conjugated words, for example - the Latvian word for “lion” is “lauva”, which

has a feminine ending, but when associated with a man (for example, in relation to the horoscope), it should be conjugated with a masculine ending.

The “winged words” category includes phrases or expressions

that have been divorced from their original meaning, but have already become widely used in society. For example, “patiesais labums”, or “true benefit”, has become divorced from the original expression “patiesais labuma guvējs” for “true beneficiary”. Another candidate is the Latvian for alarm “raisers”, or “cēlēji” and “cēlāji”.

Kolmane said the “verbiage of the year” category is still in demand. It includes the strangest string of text heard or read in serious texts, including amusing misspellings or misspeaking. Some contestants include “abolition of intimacy of members of parliament”, “I don’t have a Pandora’s box from which to take this pay!”, “Authorities captured 33kg of hashish on the border” and others.

The survey conducted by the language group in cooperation with the Latvian Writer’s Union is officially closed, and a panel of judges will take the week to look through the material that have been received over the year. The winners for the categories of word of the year, non-word, winged words and verbiage will be announced at the Riga Latvian Society House Club Hall at 11:00 a.m. on January 27.



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