

TANGO TAKES TWO: THE CONTRIBUTION OF LITHUANIAN
STATE LEADERS IN CREATING A SUPPORTIVE ENVIRONMENT
FOR DIASPORA ENGAGEMENT – THE CASE OF VYTAUTAS
LANDSBERGIS

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SUMMARY. The restoration of independence in 1990 highlighted the role of Vytautas Landsbergis, the first head of the re-established Lithuanian state. He played a key part in strengthening ties with the Lithuanian diaspora. Under his leadership, transformative initiatives were launched to involve Lithuanians abroad in shaping the nation's future. Their contributions were recognized as vital to achieving independence. Efforts to develop a diaspora policy also began, aiming to integrate Lithuanians abroad into Lithuania's political, economic, and cultural life. Landsbergis fostered a partnership with the diaspora, encouraging it not only to support Lithuania's independence but also to contribute to the development of the newly forming state's well-being.

However, early legal acts related to diaspora sparked debate. Although citizenship and property restoration laws sought to maintain a legal connection with the diaspora, restrictions on dual or multiple citizenship and requirements for permanent residence in Lithuania did not align with the expectations of the diaspora. Nevertheless, Landsbergis' initiatives laid the groundwork for long-term ties between the diaspora and Lithuania, and his efforts created conditions for the development of these relations, even if the political decisions of the time were limited by the realities of the period.

According to researchers like Jennifer M. Brinkerhoff, effective diaspora policy requires institutional capacity and a legal framework designed to foster and enhance emigrants' active participation in the nation's life.

Landsbergis' contribution, though somewhat ambiguous due to certain legal restrictions, was significant – he set the directions and foundations of diaspora policy that encouraged the diaspora to contribute to the creation of an independent Lithuania's future.

KEYWORDS: diaspora, Lithuanian independence, citizenship, restitution, Vytautas Landsbergis.

INTRODUCTION

For thousands of years, migration has been a natural phenomenon intrinsic to human existence. Although there exists a stereotype that Lithuanians are a sedentary, agrarian people, historical data indicate that, since the second half of the 19th century, the Lithuanian population has been part of significant international migration flows. Waves of both voluntary and forced migration contributed to the formation of the Lithuanian diaspora.

From a historical perspective, Lithuanians abroad have played a crucial role in the development and preservation of Lithuanian statehood, representing Lithuanian culture within the societies of their host countries, and influencing various aspects of life within Lithuanian society.

Researchers estimate varying numbers of Lithuanians and people of Lithuanian descent living abroad – ranging from one million to several million (Eidintas 2023). Naturally, for a country with a population of less than three million, migration and the diaspora are issues of significant concern.

In Lithuania, topics related to migration, including the Lithuanian diaspora, are discussed not only by the public, politicians, and the media but also attract scholarly attention.

In examining the field of Lithuanian diaspora studies, it is evident that a utilitarian paradigm¹ dominates the relationship between the ethnic² homeland and the diaspora. The diaspora is often seen as a resource for re-emigration, an informal ambassador, a lobbyist, a supporter of the homeland, and a driver of innovation. It is noteworthy that such utilitarian relationships characterize the vast majority of origin countries and their diasporas. At the same time, it should be noted that neither Lithuanian society nor academic literature raises the issue of equal partnership between the diaspora and Lithuania, nor does it consider the possibility for the diaspora to develop its own independence from the (ethnic) homeland³.

It should be noted that a utilitarian relationship does not necessarily imply exploitation. Relationships of this nature can be mutually beneficial, both materially and emotionally. Problems and dissatisfaction arise only when the expectations of one party are not met (Gamlen 2006: 13).

¹ The researchers of Lithuanian diaspora policy, Vida Bagdonavičienė and Rafael Muksinov described Lithuania's policy towards its expatriates as pragmatic (Bagdonavičienė, 2012: 36; Муксинов, 2012: 148).

² The term "ethnic homeland," coined by Arizona State University professor Takeyuki Tsuda, describes the relationship of second and subsequent generations of migrants with the country of origin of their parents, grandparents, or great-grandparents. For example, see Takeyuki Tsuda's book, *Strangers in the Ethnic Homeland: Japanese Brazilian Return Migration in Transnational Perspective*. Columbia University Press, 2003.

³ An example of such considerations can be found in the text by Greek authors: Othon Anastasakis, Kalypso Nicolaidis, and Manolis Pratsinakis. *Conclusion: A New Model of Diaspora Engagement?* In *Diaspora Engagement in Time of Severe Economic Crisis*. Ed. by Othon Anastasakis et al. Palgrave Macmillan, 2022: 433–442.

Many Lithuanian expatriates, acknowledging the undeniable importance of their homeland or ethnic country as the symbolic center of the Lithuanian nation, accept the roles assigned to them without debate. Post-war Lithuanian migrants (representatives of the so-called DP emigration wave) even developed an entire concept of the Lithuanian diaspora's mission, outlined in the *Lithuanian Charter* (Lietuvių charta). This charter was based on two fundamental goals: maintaining and fostering Lithuanian identity in the diaspora and fighting for the restoration of Lithuania's statehood.

With the restoration and consolidation of Lithuania's independence in the 1990s, the need to address the issue of reclaiming independence became obsolete. It was replaced by the desire to contribute to the development of the welfare of Lithuania's state, society, and its diaspora. This aspiration was particularly actively demonstrated by various generations of the post-war or DP emigration wave representatives. This attitude is reflected in the words of *Aidai* magazine editor Leonardas Andriekus:

"Now, the diaspora will embrace Lithuania much more closely. Nothing will hinder its interaction with the nation. Communication will be open and smooth, with intensive cultural and economic collaboration. The diaspora, which until now had operated as a separate sphere of activity due to the constraints of the occupier, will become an integral part of the nation." (Andriekus, 1991: 253)

The intentions of the diaspora are unquestionable. However, in this case, not only the disposition of Lithuanian expatriates but also the approach of Lithuania – their (ethnic) homeland – towards the diaspora is crucial. One of the indicators reflecting the (ethnic) homeland's relationship with its diaspora is the so-called diaspora policy.

In recent decades, a growing trend has emerged where countries dedicate increasing attention to their diasporas, shaping specific diaspora policies. Within the broader context of diaspora policies, post-socialist countries stand out. The collapse of the Soviet-controlled bloc of socialist states opened a new phase in the relationships between Central and Eastern European countries and their diasporas. The regime changes of the early 1990s enabled these countries to consolidate their diasporas and integrate them into an imagined national community (Kovacs 2017: 96).

Lithuania is no exception in this context. Following the restoration of independence in 1990, Lithuania gradually began shaping its relationship with compatriots abroad.

It is encouraging that this ongoing process has attracted the attention of researchers (Aleksandravičius 2006, 2008; Sinkevičius 2002; Pivoras & Saklauskaitė 2009; Pivoras 2013; Normantas 2022; Adomaitytė 2009; Budginaitė 2012; Gudelis & Klimavičiūtė 2016; Eidintas 2021: 352–358), though the body of research

remains limited. The most comprehensive analyses have been conducted by Vida Bagdonavičienė (Bagdonavičienė 2012) and Rafael Muksinov (Мукинoв 2012).

Existing studies primarily focus on identifying general trends and describing developments. Significant attention is given to analyzing Lithuania's citizenship and return migration policies, as well as examining the harnessing of diaspora potential. However, researchers have yet to explore questions regarding the personal influence of political, societal, cultural, or academic figures in shaping Lithuania's diaspora policy, including their contributions to creating (or failing to create) an environment supportive for diaspora engagement in Lithuanian society.

This aspect remains untouched in the limited biographies of modern Lithuanian state leaders (e. g., Grybkauskas & Tamošaitis 2019; Aleksandravičius 2021).

State leaders, *per excellence*, play a crucial and guiding role in setting the direction for various aspects of a country's development. They oversee the implementation of these directions, propose reforms, and so on.

The contribution of Lithuanian state leaders to the development of diaspora policy, particularly in creating a supportive environment for the diaspora's engagement in the life of their (ethnic) homeland, remains an unexplored topic in research.

The aim of this article is to present the contribution of Vytautas Landsbergis, the first state's leader⁴ of restored Lithuania, in shaping a favorable environment for diaspora engagement in Lithuania's life.

The primary sources of information for this research are Landsbergis's interviews, speeches, and articles published in Lithuanian and diaspora media. Contextual analysis of these materials highlights the first leader's role in addressing the topic under discussion.

Hopefully, this article will serve as a starting point for further and more extensive research, analyzing the contributions of other Lithuanian leaders to the development of diaspora policy.

UNPACKING LITHUANIA'S DIASPORA POLICY: METHODOLOGICAL GUIDELINES

While migration-related phenomena are often perceived as challenges for both origin and host countries, broader public discourse, academic literature offers

⁴ On June 30, 2022, the Parliament of the Republic of Lithuania officially granted state leader status to Landsbergis, Speaker of the Supreme Council – Reconstituent Seimas (SC/RS) of Lithuania. This recognition provides an additional context for analyzing Landsbergis's contribution to creating a diaspora-friendly environment in Lithuania.

alternative perspectives on these issues. Increasingly, the positive aspects of migration-related phenomena are being recognized.

Emigration, for instance, can be seen not only as a serious demographic and economic challenge for the country of origin but also as a factor that helps reduce socio-political tensions, supports economic stability through remittances, and provides opportunities for emigrants to gain valuable experience abroad. Similarly, immigrants can be perceived not just as cheap labor, a threat to national security, or a challenge to the host country's ethnic identity but also as contributors to economic growth and creators of cultural diversity within the host society.

Attitudes towards diasporas are also evolving (Gudelis & Klimavičiūtė 2016: 326). Diasporas are increasingly recognized as an integral part of modern social processes. It is no coincidence that many countries are establishing diaspora ministries or other institutions aimed at reconnecting with their diasporas and mobilizing their resources for the development of their homeland (Başer, 2019: 76).

Ideas published in academic research, expert analyses, and examples of best practices from individual countries circulate globally, becoming accessible to researchers and practitioners across different nations.

Lithuania is no exception in this regard. The previously dominant negative discourse towards migration is gradually breaking down. Increasingly, discussions focus on the benefits that emigrants can bring to their homeland. There is a growing recognition that migrants and the diaspora can become significant contributors to a country's development and welfare.

While for a long time the prevailing attitude was that "emigrants must and should" help their homeland and relatives left behind (Čiubrinkas 2006: 24–31), attention is now shifting towards the importance of creating favorable conditions for the diaspora to engage in the life of their (ethnic) homeland.

A trend has emerged in which some countries actively implement diaspora-friendly policies to harness the potential of migrants and their resources. Others, however, either consciously or unconsciously, fail to take advantage of these opportunities. Research evaluating Lithuania's diaspora policies or assessing whether favorable conditions for diaspora engagement have been established during more than 30 years of independence remains scarce.

Researchers analyzing Lithuania's diaspora policy and efforts to involve Lithuanians abroad in the life of their homeland rarely examine the contributions of specific government institutions or officials. Most studies focus solely on general trends.

Bagdonavičienė, in her research, mentions the contributions of individual governments, prime ministers, and ministers in shaping Lithuania's diaspora policy (Bagdonavičienė 2012: 49). Eidintas has expressed the opinion that "neither the

office of the president, parliamentary committees, nor the government have created attractive mechanisms to encourage citizens working abroad to return to Lithuania and attempt to realize their accumulated creative potential in their homeland” (Eidintas 2021: 358).

Despite the separation of powers and political competition, governmental structures function in a complementary manner. For this reason, it is meaningful to discuss the contributions of Lithuanian state leaders in shaping diaspora policy, particularly in creating an environment favorable to the engagement of Lithuanians abroad in the life of their homeland.

To understand the influence of Lithuanian leaders – specifically Landsbergis in this case – in forming a favorable environment for diaspora engagement, it is valuable to consider theoretical research in this area.

American researcher Jennifer M. Brinkerhoff highlights several ways in which the government or executive branch in the country of origin can create conditions beneficial to diaspora engagement:

- a) Improving policy, legal, and regulatory frameworks;
- b) Strengthening institutional capacities across various sectors and levels;
- c) Monitoring and responding to the wishes and preferences of citizens;
- d) Creating and maintaining mechanisms for management, accountability, and feedback;
- e) Mobilizing and distributing public resources and investments (Brinkerhoff 2012: 81).

The role of the executive branch in creating a supportive environment for diaspora engagement is particularly important. Alan Gamlen, Michael E. Cummings, and Paul V. Vaaler identify three pure strategies that countries of origin can adopt in their relationship with diasporas: exploitative, embracing, and regulatory approaches (Gamlen, Cummings, Vaaler 2019: 499–501).

When the (ethnic) homeland prioritizes the economic and political potential of the diaspora, it can be argued that an exploitative perspective dominates its diaspora policy. If ethnicity and identity take center stage in the policy, it reflects an embracing perspective. Meanwhile, a regulatory perspective focuses on migration management on a global scale. According to the authors, although the regulatory perspective is not widely popular, it allows countries of origin to share responsibility for managing migration processes with host countries, diaspora organizations, and global/international organizations. This perspective also encourages countries of origin to remain open to recommendations from international or global organizations and programs (Gamlen, Cummings, Vaaler 2019: 499–501).

Brinkerhoff offers a slightly different typology of the roles that states can adopt in their relationships with their diasporas. She identifies the following (pure) roles

that (ethnic) homelands can assume: obligating, facilitating, resource providing, collaborating, and supporting (Brinkerhoff 2012: 82).

Various methodologies are employed when studying different diasporas and diaspora policies.

While early diaspora research was dominated by case studies, ethnographic research, comparative methods, and statistical analysis, more recent studies have increasingly focused on micro-foundations – factors shaping diaspora policies at the micro-level (Barney, Felin 2013: 138–155).

This approach helps to understand how complex social phenomena are formed through micro-level dynamics and/or the initiatives of individual actors (Alonso, Mylonas 2019: 473–474, 488). It enables the exploration of state-diaspora relationships and allows for the analysis of various actors (both within the country and beyond) involved in shaping and implementing policies conducive to diaspora engagement (Alonso, Mylonas 2019: 474).

Actors examined through this methodology include governments, diaspora organizations, political parties, international organizations, media, businesses, and NGOs. Micro-foundation research encompasses different levels – local (municipal), state, transnational, regional, and global – and addresses migration-related phenomena across time and space, such as emigration, immigration, transit, return migration, as well as their impact on migrant identities and actions and how societies and policymakers respond to these phenomena (Alonso, Mylonas 2019: 474).

In this article, Vytautas Landsbergis's role as a state leader and his influence on creating a (un)favorable environment for the Lithuanian diaspora are analyzed as micro-foundations. It examines how he actively shaped social phenomena while also being influenced by various external factors.

VYTAUTAS LANDSBERGIS AND THE BEGINNINGS OF DIASPORA POLICY

When exploring this topic, the statements and messages from public figures and politicians advocating for Lithuania's independence before March 11, 1990, hold significant importance. It was during the late 1980s that active relationships began to form between the Lithuanian diaspora and the emerging political elite in Lithuania.

At the dawn of independence, the contacts, connections with politicians, businesspeople, and journalists in the countries where the diaspora lived, as well as material support for Lithuania, its people, and leaders, were of immense importance to a country striving to restore and consolidate its statehood. It is no surprise

that in 1988–1989, many public figures, dissidents, and members of the *Sąjūdis*⁵ movement traveled to the United States and other countries of the free world. Among them was Landsbergis⁶.

In July 1989, as Chairman of the Council of the *Sąjūdis* Seimas, Landsbergis made a private visit to the United States. He met with Lithuanian-Americans and, on July 21, participated in the Captive Nations Week events at the White House alongside members of the Lithuanian-American community (Landsbergis baigia apsilankymą 1989: 1).

In August 1989, Landsbergis, along with a large group of Lithuania's political and cultural elite, participated in the European Lithuanian Studies Week (Europos lietuviškųjų studijų savaitės) held on Gotland Island. During this event, the so-called Gotland Communiqué was adopted, signaling that representatives of *Sąjūdis*, the diaspora, and even the Lithuanian Communist Party (the communiqué was also signed by a member of the Communist Party, Justas Paleckis) were united in their pursuit of Lithuania's independence.

This document is significant not only because it demonstrated unity between Lithuania and its diaspora but also because it showed the diaspora that Lithuania's representatives regarded them as co-creators of the country's future. This symbolic message was incredibly important and strengthened the Lithuanian diaspora's determination to do everything in their power to help their homeland break free from the grip of the occupier. In this context, Landsbergis reflected the general stance of the Lithuanian political elite at the time, which was to involve the diaspora in the process of building Lithuania – or at least allowed diaspora representatives to perceive it that way.

In November 1989, Vytautas Landsbergis made another visit to the United States. On November 20, along with other *Sąjūdis* representatives (Zigmas Vaišvila and Antanas Buračas), he spoke at the USA Council on Foreign Relations. From November 22 to 26, he participated in the 6th World Lithuanian Science and Creativity Symposium. At this event, *Sąjūdis* representatives (Landsbergis, Romualdas Ozolas, Mečys Laurinkus, and Vytautas Radžvilas) provided the diaspora with a

⁵ The *Sąjūdis*, initially known as the Reform Movement of Lithuania (Lietuvos Persitvarkymo Sąjūdis), is a political movement which led the struggle for Lithuanian independence in the late 1980s and early 1990s. It was established on 3 June 1988 as the opposition movement in Soviet Lithuania, and was led by Vytautas Landsbergis. Its goal was to seek the return of independent status for Lithuania.

⁶ Landsbergis demonstrated a deeper understanding of the Lithuanian diaspora than many other political and societal leaders of that time in Lithuania. The Landsbergis family experienced division during World War II. After the war, his elder brother, sister, and father ended up in the so-called free world, while Vytautas Landsbergis and his mother remained in Soviet-occupied Lithuania. Landsbergis's father, Vytautas Landsbergis-Žemkalnis, returned to Lithuania in 1959, while his brother became a prominent figure in the Lithuanian community in Australia.

detailed presentation on *Sąjūdis* and the processes taking place in Lithuania and the Soviet empire.

In his speech to the symposium participants, Landsbergis again emphasized the theme of joint efforts by the Lithuanian public and the diaspora for Lithuania's freedom. He also offered a kind of mission statement for the diaspora:

"It is also worth mentioning one aspect of new activities, new emerging areas in Lithuania, namely, raising awareness and, with the help of your struggles and efforts, bringing the issue of Lithuania's rights to the international stage. From our perspective, this international stage stretches from Moscow to Washington <...>." (VI-tasis mokslo 1990: 16).

During one of his speeches at the symposium, the Chairman of the *Sąjūdis* Seimas Council, Landsbergis, issued a warning: "The diaspora's time of trial has come – to love Lithuania not as an idealized, distant fairytale princess, but as poor, sick, violated, drunk, and dirty. Will there be strength to love such Lithuania?" (Landsbergis 2002: 40–41). According to Landsbergis, these words brought tears to more than a few symposium participants. However, his words turned to be prophetic. In the 1990s, many members of the diaspora, confronted with the reality of post-Soviet Lithuania, rhetorically asked whether this was Lithuania, they had fought for. Only a few diaspora representatives, understanding the extent of the moral and social distortions inflicted on Lithuanian society during the Soviet era, opted to become co-creators of the Lithuanian state and society, contributing to the spiritual revival of its people.

By the summer and fall of 1989, it became clear to the Lithuanian diaspora that Landsbergis was the leader of the Lithuanian nation and its entire people, firmly advocating for the restoration of Lithuania's independence. His unwavering commitment to unconditional separation from the Soviet Union motivated the diaspora to assist Landsbergis in every possible way. The role of Landsbergis in the Proclamation the Independence Declaration on March 11, 1990, and especially during the tragic events of January 13, 1991⁷ significantly strengthened Landsbergis's position as a leader of Lithuanian state and society. Moreover, his occasional remarks in speeches and writings gave the impression that the diaspora was welcomed as an equal partner in creating Lithuania's prosperity.

The Declaration of Independence, signed on March 11th, 1990 marked the fulfillment of a long-held hope in both Lithuania and the diaspora: the restoration of Lithuania's independence. The diaspora received this news with immense

⁷ The January Events were a series of violent confrontations between the civilian population of Lithuania, supporting independence, and the Soviet Armed Forces. The events took place between 11 and 13 January 1991, after the restoration of independence by Lithuania. As a result of the Soviet military actions, 14 civilians were killed and almost a thousand more people were injured or otherwise affected.

enthusiasm, viewing Landsbergis as the person who had led Lithuania to independence. He was met with gratitude and respect, often regarded as the head of state and frequently referred to as “president” in various texts.

During Landsbergis’s first visits as Lithuania’s leader in 1990–1991, the diaspora greeted him with pomp, ovations, and chants. His May 1991 visit to Chicago and Lemont was particularly notable for its extraordinary reception (*Lietuvos prezidentas Amerikoje* 1991: 6).

Despite the many challenges and problems Landsbergis faced during the difficult years of 1990–1992 as he worked to address the needs of the young Lithuanian state, the diaspora was not forgotten. Several key moments stand out in Landsbergis’s texts from this period.

The first key point is the partnership between the diaspora and Lithuania in pursuing goals important to the country. This continuity reflects what Landsbergis frequently emphasized in 1989. However, this time, an official state representative and leader expressed the attitude.

In August 1990, Landsbergis participated in the European Lithuanian Studies Week held in Einsiedeln, Switzerland, where nearly a hundred participants from Lithuania gathered. On August 11, 1990, a joint appeal by the Republic of Lithuania and representatives of the Lithuanian diaspora was signed, addressing the nations of the world. The document stated:

“We hope that democratic societies and governments will not tolerate such usurpations and violations of Lithuania’s sovereignty and will contribute to normalizing the situation in Lithuania and throughout the Baltic region. When the rights of nations and states are stripped away by the force of a larger state, the entire framework of international law is endangered” (*Kreipimasis* 1990: 12).

This document reaffirmed that Lithuania, now represented by official state leaders, regarded the diaspora as an equal partner in achieving goals significant to the country.

Another prominent aspect in Landsbergis’s texts from the early 1990s is his call for the diaspora to maintain active ties (in various forms) with Lithuania. Notably, in the summer of 1990, Landsbergis issued an appeal *To Lithuanian Youth in the Diaspora*. In it, he outlined key principles for both Lithuania and the younger diaspora generation in a globalized world:

“If many of you, perhaps each of you, or maybe just some who tell themselves, ‘I am with Lithuania,’ decide so, you can also say something else. You can choose to be with Lithuania itself, within Lithuania. Here, a significant number of your peers have found meaningful activities, they are active, and they help Lithuania, experiencing the joy of being able to contribute.

You can also be with Lithuania while living and working elsewhere, by resolving that at least part of your life, your interests, will never be detached from Lithuania's challenges. Some of you may, sooner or later, visit Lithuania or even settle here for a longer period, integrating into the life of the land of your parents and ancestors as a part of your nation's and society's creative process. This gives awareness and meaning to the lives of our youth in Lithuania, and it can happen in your lives as well. Now, being far from Lithuania, yet with your thoughts turned towards it, you can orient yourselves and prepare for work and life in Lithuania. Alternatively, at the very least, prepare for the possibility of visiting Lithuania, whether briefly or for a longer period, as part of a kind of *Peace Corps* of Lithuanians and their descendants scattered around the world.

You can, as before, prepare for your personal lives in your current countries of residence, but with a certain inner resolve: to do something for Lithuania, to help it even from afar. Help with words, with public support, politically, or materially. For many of your parents and friends, this is significant. I could simply say this: Lithuania needs you" (Landsbergis 1990: 42).

It is evident that Landsbergis valued the diaspora's contribution in raising the issue of Lithuania's illegal annexation on the international stage and recognized the priceless support the diaspora provided to the young Lithuanian state. Looking to the future, he envisioned the Lithuanian diaspora as an inseparable part of Lithuania's culture, maintaining a close connection with the country. He urged the diaspora to nurture this connection, which, in his view, could take a variety of forms. While Landsbergis invited the diaspora to return to Lithuania and participate in building its prosperity alongside its people, he also acknowledged other forms of interaction between the diaspora and Lithuania.

It is important to note that Landsbergis was not the sole Lithuanian leader or activist who conveyed messages about the homeland's (un)readiness to involve the diaspora in the affairs of the newly established state.

The topic under analysis highlights the importance of a letter written by Lithuania's first Minister of Culture and Education, Darius Kuolys, to the then Minister of Finance, Romualdas Sikorskis, in August 1990. The letter emphasizes that Lithuanians living abroad had become a matter of concern for the Lithuanian state. It outlines key objectives for the emerging Lithuanian diaspora policy:

1. To create conditions for Lithuanians abroad to maintain ties with their homeland;
2. To help Lithuanians abroad preserve their ethnographic and historical memory; and
3. To support the establishment of a unified organizational structure for Lithuanians worldwide (Bagdonavičienė 2012: 38,166–167).

This document demonstrates that concern for the Lithuanian diaspora was shared not only by Vytautas Landsbergis but also by other Lithuanian politicians and officials. It is worth noting that, at the start of independence, considerable attention was given to the so-called Eastern diaspora⁸. In 1990, the *State Commission for Solving the Problems of Eastern Lithuania* began its work.

However, the establishment of institutions related to the Lithuanian diaspora in other parts of the world was delayed due to the long and arduous journey the young Lithuanian state had to undertake in consolidating its statehood, gaining international recognition, and withdrawing the occupying army (1993). As life in Lithuania normalized, the *Representation of the World Lithuanian Community* was established in Lithuania in 1992 (Bagdonavičienė 2012: 37).

These institutions, which laid the foundation for Lithuania's diaspora policy, emerged during V. Landsbergis's leadership of the country. However, this does not imply that the achievements were solely his. Rather, it reflects a broader trend where both Landsbergis and other responsible politicians and officials of the time recognized the importance of the Lithuanian diaspora. Even under extremely challenging circumstances for the young state, attention was given to Lithuanians or individuals of Lithuanian descent both in the East and the West.

It should also be noted that analyzing the contributions of other Lithuanian political and societal leaders of that period, as well as other micro-factors that shaped Lithuania's subsequent diaspora policy, requires a more extensive study. This article focuses on the role of Vytautas Landsbergis.

Despite the close relationship with the diaspora and its role in preserving Lithuanian statehood during the Cold War, not all of Landsbergis's actions received a positive assessment from members of the diaspora. Algirdas Brazauskas, Landsbergis's eternal rival in the newly independent Lithuania, noted that after Landsbergis's leadership, he inherited two significant issues in relations with the diaspora. One, connected with Lithuanian citizenship, and the other, related to property in Lithuania that had been nationalized during the occupation (Brazauskas 2000: 183). The role Landsbergis played in shaping the Lithuanian state's positions on these issues during the early years of independence will be explored further in the following text.

⁸ Lithuanian communities in the territory of the former USSR, in areas such as Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, Latvia, Kazakhstan, and other parts of the Soviet Union. These communities were formed as a result of various historical circumstances, including forced deportations, migration for work, or settlement during the Soviet era.

LANDSBERGIS, THE DIASPORA, AND ISSUES OF CITIZENSHIP AND PROPERTY RESTITUTION

In Lithuania's public discourse, opinions about Landsbergis's activities are highly polarized. A segment of society tends to blame the first *de facto* leader of Lithuania for almost every conceivable fault, often without considering the extent of his personal responsibility.

In 1990, under Landsbergis's leadership, *Sąjūdis* won a majority in the elections for the Supreme Council – Reconstituent Seimas (SC/RS). Until November 25, 1992, he served as the speaker of the SC/RS, a role that formally represented the leadership of the Lithuanian state. As Landsbergis himself noted, the *Sąjūdis* majority, which had won the 1990 elections and declared the Independence Act of March 11, 1990 quickly fractured, leaving the parliament, its speaker, and the government to operate under very challenging conditions (Landsbergis, 2024: 24). While Landsbergis, as speaker of the SC/RS, bears responsibility for the legal acts adopted during that period, it is essential to remember that he was the leader of a democratically functioning legislative body, not an autocratic ruler. Therefore, responsibility for the laws and resolutions adopted during this time is shared with other members of the SC/RS.

This section aims to examine Landsbergis's role in shaping a legislative framework that was either favorable or unfavorable for diaspora engagement in Lithuanian life. This framework is represented by the legal acts adopted by the SC/RS and the draft of the Lithuanian Constitution prepared during the 1990–1992 period. In the first case, Landsbergis held functions related to the initiation, coordination, and supervision of laws and resolutions. In the second, he served as the leader of the first group tasked with drafting the Constitution.

It is essential to note that during this time, the young state's leader faced numerous critically important issues, and matters related to the diaspora were not of the first priority. However, for diaspora representatives, legislation affecting them was of primary importance.

Following the restoration of independence, the *Provisional Basic Law* (Laikinasis Pagrindinis Įstatymas) – a temporary constitution of Lithuania – was in effect for a period. This law determined that Lithuanian citizenship was defined by the Citizenship Law of the Soviet Socialist Republic of Lithuania (SSRL), adopted on November 3, 1989. This law classified citizens into four categories:

1. Those who were citizens of the Republic of Lithuania, their children, and grandchildren, as well as others, who were permanent residents of the current territory of the Lithuanian SSR before June 15, 1940, along with their

children and grandchildren, provided they were permanent residents of the SSRL territory.

2. Persons with permanent residence in the SSRL who were born there or could prove that a parent or grandparent was born there. They must not hold citizenship of another country.
3. Persons who lived in the SSRL when the law came into force, and had a permanent job or legal income. They had two years to decide on their citizenship.
4. Those who acquired citizenship of the SSRL under this law (Law November 3, 1989).

It is evident that this law, adopted under annexation, could not meet the needs of the young Lithuanian state, its society, or the diaspora. It was created with a different intention – to establish a legal framework for protecting the interests of permanent residents of the SSRL and enabling them to participate in the restoration of a sovereign Lithuanian state (Lietuviška pilietybės svarstyta, 1989: 1).

Unsurprisingly, the SC/RS, led by Landsbergis, had to repeatedly return to amending this law. One of the motives for these amendments was the attempt to address the interests of the Lithuanian diaspora⁹.

For example, on June 19, 1990, the Supreme Council resolved “To clarify that, based on Article 7 and the third part of Article 35 of the Citizenship Law of the Republic of Lithuania, a person who acquires the citizenship of the Republic of Lithuania is considered to have lost their citizenship of another state” (Resolution June 19, 1990). On November 15, 1990, the Supreme Council further amended the existing Citizenship Law, stating: “Individuals who are citizens of foreign countries or stateless persons acquire documents confirming citizenship of the Republic of Lithuania only after permanently relocating to the Republic of Lithuania and renouncing their foreign citizenship or stateless status and providing identity-confirming documents to the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Republic of Lithuania” (Resolution, November 15, 1990).

On April 16, 1991, an amendment to the 1989 Citizenship Law was adopted, introducing an additional condition for the loss of citizenship of the Republic of Lithuania: the acquisition of citizenship in another state (Law April 16, 1991).

The inclusion of this legal conditions, which treated the acquisition of another country’s citizenship as a factor limiting Lithuanian citizenship, caused concern among Lithuanians abroad. During a meeting on May 6, 1991, between Landsbergis and the Supreme Committee for the Liberation of Lithuania (Vyriausiasis

⁹ In this case, the focus is not only on relations with Lithuanians abroad or individuals of Lithuanian descent but also with people of other nationalities.

Lietuvos Išlaisvinimo komitetas), the Speaker of Parliament was asked whether it was true that the Lithuanian Parliament had passed a law revoking Lithuanian citizenship from members of the diaspora. Landsbergis did not provide a definitive answer at the time but promised to consult with legal advisors (Landsbergis – VLIK, 1991: 5).

The numerous revisions and amendments illustrate that the 1989 SSRL Citizenship Law was incompatible with the realities of a reestablished Lithuanian state. A new version of the law, intended to address these issues, was adopted on December 5, 1991. This legal act explicitly emphasized in several places that Lithuanian citizens could not hold citizenship in other countries, using phrases such as “if they have not acquired the citizenship of another state,” “are not citizens of another state,” and “upon renouncing the citizenship of another state” (Law December 5, 1991).

On December 10, 1991, the Supreme Council of the Republic of Lithuania amended the law passed just five days earlier with conditions addressing second-generation migrants. Following these changes, the law stated that the right to Lithuanian citizenship or the restoration of Lithuanian citizenship applied to:

“Persons of Lithuanian descent who held citizenship of the Republic of Lithuania and who, between June 15, 1940, and March 11, 1990, left Lithuania, reside in other countries, and their children, **who at birth in another country did not acquire the citizenship of that country** [emphasis added, I. S.], shall restore Lithuanian citizenship by submitting a written declaration to the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Republic of Lithuania or Lithuanian diplomatic missions abroad stating that they are citizens of the Republic of Lithuania, along with evidence confirming this” (Law December 10, 1991).

It is evident that while the new citizenship law affirmed the continuity of the institution of citizenship that existed until June 15, 1940, it also excluded individuals who had acquired citizenship in another state from being recognized as Lithuanian citizens (Sinkevičius 2002: 132, 135).

Vytautas Sinkevičius, after analyzing the parliamentary transcripts of the deliberations on this law, noted that the motivation behind adopting such a law stemmed from concerns among parliamentarians. These included fears of having to review other already adopted laws (such as property restitution and privatization), worries that dual citizenship could harm Lithuania’s geopolitical interests, and similar issues (Sinkevičius 2002: 132).

It is worth noting that these arguments in Parliament were not made by Landsbergis but by deputies such as Egidijus Jarašiūnas (a *Sąjūdis* representative and one of the founders of the Homeland Union-Lithuanian Conservatives) and Kazimieras Antanavičius (a Social Democrat) (Sinkevičius 2002: 132).

The citizenship law adopted in December 1991 faced criticism from the diaspora. In response, in the spring of 1992, Landsbergis had to address the diaspora directly, commenting on the situation associated with the restoration and preservation of citizenship. The first state leader of restored Lithuania wrote:

“Dear Compatriots, news has reached me that you are still troubled by uncertainties, misunderstandings, and grievances related to our new and subsequently amended Lithuanian citizenship law. I want to clarify that, according to the latest version of this law, those of you who were citizens of the Republic of Lithuania before June 15, 1940, only need to obtain a current document confirming your Lithuanian citizenship. This means receiving a Lithuanian citizenship certificate or a new Lithuanian passport from our embassies, consulates, or the Ministry of Internal Affairs.” (Pilietybės įstatymo, 1992: 1)

Landsbergis emphasized the continuity of Lithuanian citizenship held before June 15, 1940, in the reestablished Republic of Lithuania after March 11, 1990. However, he avoided addressing the highly sensitive issue of dual or multiple citizenship for the diaspora.

Landsbergis’s statement was accompanied by a broader explanation from the Supreme Council’s legal advisor, Šarūnas Adomavičius. He clarified that “persons of Lithuanian descent who held citizenship of the Republic of Lithuania and who left Lithuania between June 15, 1940, and March 11, 1990, and are living in other countries **do not necessarily need to renounce their current citizenship of another state or relocate permanently to Lithuania to restore their Lithuanian citizenship**” (Pilietybės įstatymo 1992: 1, emphasis added, I. S.).

Adomavičius’s statement clearly contradicted the citizenship law adopted in December 1991. However, it sustained the diaspora’s hope that Lithuania would treat foreign Lithuanians as equal co-creators of the restored state in its legal framework.

As noted by Normantas, Lithuanian citizenship is a constitutional institution (Normantas 2022: 250). When examining the relationship between the diaspora and Lithuanian citizenship during the early years of independence, it is important to review how this issue was defined in the country’s foundational law and to consider Landsbergis’s role in the drafting of the Constitution of the Republic of Lithuania.

On November 7, 1990, the Presidium of the Supreme Council approved a working group tasked with drafting a concept for the Constitution of the Republic of Lithuania. This group was chaired by Landsbergis. The group presented the result of its work – the Draft Concept of the Constitution of the Republic of Lithuania – on May 10, 1991, in the newspaper *Lietuvos aidas* (Jankauskas, Spruogis, Večerskytė). In the draft Constitution, citizenship was addressed in a specific clause:

“Citizenship of the Republic of Lithuania is acquired by birth and other means established by law. A citizen of the Republic of Lithuania may lose their citizenship by renouncing it **or by acquiring the citizenship of a foreign state** [emphasis added, I. S.]. Only in exceptional cases, as specified in the Constitution, does the Republic of Lithuania recognize dual citizenship. The procedure for acquiring and losing citizenship is determined by the Citizenship Law” (Draft Concept 1991: 4).

In this draft, the acquisition of foreign citizenship was treated as grounds for an individual or their descendants to lose the right to Lithuanian citizenship held prior to June 15, 1940.

Subsequently, additional working groups were formed to prepare the final text of the Constitution. While Landsbergis did not hold formal roles in these groups, he was, of course, involved in the constitutional drafting process (Landsbergis 2024: 23).

The Constitution of the Republic of Lithuania approved in a referendum on October 25, 1992, defined citizenship in Article 12 as follows:

“Citizenship of the Republic of Lithuania is acquired by birth and other means established by law. Except in individual cases specified by law, **no one may be a citizen of both the Republic of Lithuania and another state** [emphasis added, I. S.]. The procedure for acquiring and losing citizenship is determined by law” (Constitution 1992). The Constitution also assigned the President of the Republic a function related to citizenship: granting Lithuanian citizenship in accordance with the law (Constitution 1992).

Thus, the Constitution enshrined the principle of incompatibility between Lithuanian citizenship and citizenship in other states, except in specific cases established by law. On the other hand, the Constitution referenced the Citizenship Law and the President’s institution, both of which could, in certain instances, modify the strict legal provisions of the Constitution.

The drafting of laws in Parliament and the preparation of the Constitution during the early years of independence were closely interrelated and intertwined activities. A closer look at these processes reveals the positions of Lithuania’s political elite at the time, including the first leader of restored independent state, on various issues, including the diaspora and the creation (or lack thereof) of favorable conditions for its integration into Lithuanian life. It is evident that Lithuania and the diaspora had differing expectations regarding citizenship, which were not reconciled in the early years of independence.

The issues of citizenship were also closely linked to the restitution of real estate and privatization of property.

On June 18, 1991, the SC/RS enacted a law specifying that property rights to retained real estate would be reinstated to 1) To the former owners, if they are

Lithuanian citizen according to the law. They must have proof of citizenship and live permanently in Lithuania; 2) To the heirs of the former owners, including children, adopted children, parents, adoptive parents, or spouses. They must be Lithuanian citizens, have proof of citizenship, and live permanently in Lithuania (Law June 18, 1991)

In both cases, the right to restitution of the retained property was limited to citizens of Lithuania who were permanent residents of the Republic of Lithuania. This provision appeared in other legal acts as well. Similar stipulations were repeated in subsequent laws adopted by the SC/RS.

The Law on the Initial Privatization of State Property of the Republic of Lithuania, adopted on February 28, 1991, designated the following groups as eligible to acquire privatized property:

“Citizens of the Republic of Lithuania, as well as individuals who, as of the date of entry into force of this law, **were entitled to Lithuanian citizenship under the Citizenship Law of the Republic of Lithuania** [emphasis added, I. S.].” However, another conditions of the same law allowed: “**Physical and legal persons of Lithuania and other countries** [emphasis added, I. S.] to acquire privatization objects (shares) listed in a separate list approved by the Supreme Council of the Republic of Lithuania, provided they pay in freely convertible currency” (Law February 28, 1991).

Two weeks later, on March 14, 1991, an amendment to the law on the initial privatization of state property narrowed the circle of eligible participants in the privatization process, excluding those entitled to Lithuanian citizenship. It stated: “Privatization objects (shares) may be acquired by citizens of the Republic of Lithuania. This provision does not apply to the acquisition of apartments from the state and public housing fund” (Law March 14, 1991).

Thus, the lack of Lithuanian citizenship effectively barred diaspora representatives from participating in the privatization of certain property. In other cases, they were treated no differently than other foreign nationals seeking to acquire privatized assets in Lithuania. No prioritization of the diaspora was evident.

CONCLUSIONS

The legal acts adopted during the early years of independence (1990–1992) were not favorable to the diaspora’s engagement in Lithuania’s life. Through its citizenship policy, particularly the restriction on dual citizenship, Lithuania complicated and ultimately reduced the scope of return migration and the potential influence of emigrants on the newly emerging Lithuanian state and society.

Recalling the indicators identified by American researcher Jennifer M. Brinkerhoff, which signal a country's efforts to create conditions supportive to diaspora engagement, it can be observed that during this period, attempts were made to improve political, legal, and regulatory systems. Efforts were also made to monitor citizens' wishes and respond to them. However, balancing the interests of Lithuania's residents and the diaspora during this time proved challenging.

Landsbergis's role in shaping an environment (un)favorable to diaspora engagement in Lithuania's life can be characterized in two ways. On the one hand, his statements before the restoration of the independence contributed to the formation of diaspora expectations of being equal to residents of Lithuania in an independent state. On the other hand, the realities of the early independence years – geopolitical concerns and the social and economic situation – dictated policies that did not align with the diaspora's interests.

Subsequent Lithuanian's leaders were left to address these shortcomings and seek ways to improve the situation for the diaspora.

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TANGO ŠOKAMAS DVIESE, ARBA LIETUVOS VALSTYBĖS VADOVŲ INDĖLIS KURIANT
DIASPOROS ĮSITRAUKIMUI PALANKIĄ APLINKĄ: VYTAUTO LANDSBERGIO ATVEJIS

SANTRAUKA. Nepriklausomybės atgavimas 1990 metais įtvirtino Vytauto Landsbergio, pirmojo atkurtos Lietuvos valstybės vadovo, vaidmenį stiprinant ryšius su lietuvių diaspora. Jo vadovaujamos iniciatyvos aktyviai įtraukė užsienio lietuvius į valstybės gyvenimą, pripažįstant jų indėlį į Lietuvos nepriklausomybės atkūrimą ir įtvirtinant diasporos politiką, kuria siekta integruoti tautiečius į šalies politinį, ekonominį bei kultūrinį gyvenimą. Landsbergis puoselėjo partnerystę su diaspora, skatindamas ją ne tik palaikyti Lietuvos nepriklausomybę, bet ir įsitraukti į naujai kuriamos valstybės gerovės stiprinimą.

Vis dėlto ankstyvieji diasporos integracijos teisės aktai susilaukė diskusijų. Nors pilietybės ir nuosavybės atkūrimo įstatymai siekė išlaikyti teisinį ryšį su diaspora, dvigubos pilietybės apribojimai ir reikalavimai dėl nuolatinės gyvenamosios vietos Lietuvoje neatitiko diasporos lūkesčių. Nepaisant to, Landsbergio iniciatyvos kūrė pagrindą ilgalaikiams diasporos ir Lietuvos ryšiams, o jo pastangos sudarė sąlygas šių santykių raidai, net jei politiniai sprendimai to meto realijose buvo riboti.

Tyrėjų, tokių kaip Brinkerhoff, požiūriu, diasporos politika reikalauja institucinių gebėjimų ir teisinės sistemos, palankios emigrantų įsitraukimui į šalies gyvenimą. Vytauto Landsbergio indėlis, nors ir dviprasmiškas dėl tam tikrų teisinių suvaržymų, buvo reikšmingas – jis nustatė diasporos politikos kryptis ir pagrindus, skatinančius diasporą prisidėti prie nepriklausomos Lietuvos ateities kūrimo.

RAKTAŽODŽIAI: diaspora, Lietuvos nepriklausomybė, pilietybė, restitucija, Vytautas Landsbergis.