

## Vilnius Lithuanian Academic Community during the Interwar Period: Horizons of Expression of Cultural Identity

### Summary

The beginning of cultural consolidation of Lithuanian students is associated with the establishment of a community-based organization – Vilnius Lithuanian student union, initiated by the university students in Lithuania in 1925. Leaders of the established student organization raised targets to not only mobilise all Lithuanian students in Vilnius region, to develop their national consciousness, but also to spread their Lithuanian identity in society.

They started to coherently develop cultural and educational activities in the Lithuanian society of Vilnius region, but the most important organisational tool was the establishment of sections of Vilnius Lithuanian student union in the beginning of the fourth decade of the twentieth century, which allowed to implement creative student ideas and better understand the function of intellectuals in society.

Student theatre activities organised and coordinated by the Drama section of the Student Union in 1931 in Vilnius were very important from the viewpoint of development of cultural expression in province. Sources demonstrate that the student community had a good understanding of theatre opportunities and prospects not only for the development of creativity, but also the national culture, dissemination of ideas, and moral, aesthetic education.

Significant part of bringing together students and cultural expression was publication of the cultural magazine *Lietuviškas baras* in 1933–1939. Publications promoted young Lithuanian intellectuals and their aspirations, ideas, encouraged criticism and intellectual debate on the issues of cultural identity of the public. Many authors emphasized the importance of the Lithuanian language, history and cultural heritage in the development of cultural identity.

Lithuanian students cooperated closely with Art and Literature Society of Vilnius Lithuanians, attended by all most famous artists and writers of Vilnius area. Some students and graduates directly integrated into the organization, the public events of which discussed the issues of interaction between art and morals, promotion of creativity and other topics important for intellectuals.

The student society participated in the discussion of Lithuanian education problems, joined the organizations that were directly involved in the educational process, lectured in the courses for teachers organised by the Lithuanian Education Society *Rytas*, took part in the educational events of St. Casimir Society and cooperated with the Lithuanian Scientific Society Library.

After the beginning of the Second World War, when Lithuania regained

Vilnius on 10 October 1939, Lithuanian students have been active in academic and cultural integration, aiming that their University being reorganised and adapted to meet the needs of the Lithuanian society.

Based on the analysis of manuscripts and published sources, the article analy-

ses the assumptions and conditions of this community of Vilnius Lithuanian students who studied at the University in inter-war years, areas and the trends of cultural expression in society, attempting to determine student attitudes in developing the cultural identity of Lithuanians of Vilnius region.

**Key words:** Lithuanians of Vilnius, Education, Academic Community, Cultural Identity.

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