



## BRITISH-LITHUANIAN SOCIETY

### MINUTES OF ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

29 November 2023

7.00 pm

Embassy of Lithuania  
2 Bessborough Gardens  
London SW1V 2JE

#### 1.0 Approval of agenda and quorum for AGM

The agenda met with the meeting's approval. The Chair declared the meeting quorate, since more than 15 members of the Society were present as required by the Constitution.

#### 2.0/3.0 Minutes of 2019 Annual General Meeting and matters arising

Since no AGM was held in 2020, 2021 or 2022 the meeting that took place in 2019 was the Society's last AGM. These minutes were circulated via email to members by the Acting Secretary. There were no matters arising. The Chair signed the minutes of the 2019 AGM.

#### 4.0 Chair's report (Simon Butt)

Simon Butt, Chair of the Society, delivered the following report:

First of all, my thanks to all of you who are present here this evening. It is only through the interest and support of its members that the Society will be able to continue.

Second, as ever, our thanks to all at the Embassy of the Republic of Lithuania for their continued support of our meetings and activities.

Third, and far more briefly than he deserves, I would like to thank most warmly our retiring Secretary, Aleksas Vilcinskas, who is currently recovering from an operation and unable to be present. His work for the Society over decades has been quite invaluable.

I thank also Professor Richard Butterwick-Pawlikowski and Zita Cepaite who are stepping down from the Committee after years of much appreciated service. And thanks too to all those who are continuing on our Committee, especially our longstanding Treasurer, Peter Howe. He too will be looking to retire in time, so suitably qualified volunteers to succeed him will be most welcome.

We have a treat in store this evening as Romas Kinka is to deliver our keynote address, which honours the memory of Michael Peart. Romas is an old friend of the Society: a distinguished linguist, translator and advocate for Lithuania. He held positions of significant responsibility during the crucial years 1990-92 and he will be talking about his experiences.

This is our first AGM since 19 June 2019. Like so many organisations our activities were disrupted by Covid. In May 2020, when it became clear we would not be able to hold an AGM, I sent a message to members summarising our activity over the preceding year. I noted that we had had to suspend planned events with HM Ambassador to Vilnius Brian Olley; former MP and Minister Laima Andrikiene and journalist Allide Naylor. We had however inter alia passed a very interesting evening with the Rev Canon Michael Bourdeaux, founder of Keston College (and now sadly no longer with us).

'Tiltas' continued to appear, thanks to the efforts of Aleksas and contributors, with its last edition in November 2021. Last year we held three speaker meetings with Professor Richard Butterwick-Pawlikowski; John Whittingdale MP, and Kathleen Soriano, Curator of the excellent Dulwich College Ciurlionis exhibition.

Since then however activities have rather been on hold while the future of the Society was considered. In April last year I sent out a message about this, noting the problems we were facing (which I shall not rehearse now) and stating:

"The aim is to secure a productive future in some form for the Society and Tiltas Trust. The alternative I fear is continued shrinkage, apathy and ultimately extinction".

For around a year I pursued contacts with various organisations to see whether some sort of co-operation or link-up might help to boost the prospects of our own Society. However, none of them offered a good fit. In January this year I reported back to members and launched a consultation on the Society's future, together with an appeal for candidates to come forward to renew the leadership of the Society. In September I reported on the results of that consultation and invited members to resume paying annual fees, which had been suspended in 2020.

I'm very pleased that we now have David Clarke willing to succeed me as Chairman; Francis Young willing to succeed Aleksas as Secretary and Darius Furmonavicius willing to join our Committee; and to assist the Chairman. I circulated their details and qualifications in September and I very much hope that this AGM will agree to elect them to those positions.

Under their leadership the Society will move to a more Zoom-based structure, although physical meetings will still happen from time to time. We held an inaugural Zoom meeting with Ambassador Brian Olley last month. A recording is now available on the Society's website (which itself is being refreshed).

I think that this new team and direction offer the best opportunity for the Society to develop into the future. I would like to extend every good wish to David, Francis & Darius for success in their work. At the same time, I appeal to all members to continue your support, including by resuming your payment of fees. As I said at the outset, it is your Society; and without you, it cannot thrive.

## **5.0 Secretary's and *Tiltas* Editor's report (Francis Young)**

Since the Secretary, Aleksas Vilcinskas, was absent from the meeting for health reasons, a report written jointly by Aleksas Vilcinskas and Francis Young was delivered by the Acting Secretary, Francis Young.

I wish to begin by expressing my sincere thanks, and the thanks of the British-Lithuanian Society, to the Society's long-serving outgoing Secretary Aleksas Vilcinskas, who cannot be here this evening; however, we wish him the very best for his thorough recovery from his recent operation. Aleksas has kindly supplied part of this Secretary's report, and writes:

The last AGM was held on 17 June 2019, at which time we had 122 members, of which 51 were Ordinary members, 36 Sustaining, 2 Corporate, 13 Life, and 20 Honorary.

After that AGM we held one talk and a Christmas party in 2019 and two events in 2020. We were already organising the third one – with a speaker coming from Vilnius – when it became clear that Covid was a serious, highly contagious disease and all public activities ceased. Consequently no AGM was held in 2020. However, all the usual reports were circulated to the membership by e-mail. Activities recommenced in Spring of last year, during the course of which we had four talks.

Committee meetings also stopped in 2020. They did not resume till last year when the main agenda topic was the future of the Society. The membership was kept informed about our thinking by means of e-mail circulars drafted by Simon Butt.

*Tiltas* journal continued to be published until Autumn/Winter 2021. The last issue, thus far hopefully, was Volume 21, Number 2.

### *5.1 Membership*

The Society's membership currently stands at a total of 61, of whom 19 have paid the ordinary membership fee, 12 have paid the membership fee and a donation to the Tiltas Trust in order to become sustaining members, and 2 are student members. 28 people remain life members of the Society.

### *5.2 Events*

Members of the existing committee met with new prospective officers of the committee at the Lithuanian Embassy in an informal meeting on 12 September in order to discuss the revival of the Society and its future direction. At that meeting, the general feeling was that a viable model for the Society's future events was a single in-person event a year (the AGM, featuring a visiting speaker), and a number of online events with invited speakers during the year. The first of these online events took place on 25 October when the United Kingdom's Ambassador to Lithuania, Brian Olley, spoke to the Society. The newly elected Committee will meet via Zoom in late 2023 or early 2024 in order to determine speakers and dates for online events for the coming year.

### *5.3 Tiltas*

Publishing is my particular area of interest and expertise, and I am eager to revive *Tiltas* and begin editing a new number early in 2024; contributions from members and non-members on any aspect of Lithuanian life, history and culture are eagerly sought! I anticipate that, going forward, *Tiltas* will be first and foremost an electronic publication in order to make the cost and logistics and publication manageable.

## **6.0 Treasurer's report for the years ended 31 December 2021 and 2022 (Peter Howe)**

The Treasurer noted that the Lithuanian Embassy was unhappy with cash being handled on the premises, so the Society took over funding refreshments for events. He noted that subscriptions paid in 2023 will be treated as 2024 subscription income, and said that the Society should aim for an income of £3000 per year as a target. He delivered the following report:

### *6.1 2021 Actual*

Subscriptions for the year were suspended – although donations of £157 were received. As a result of Covid restrictions, there were no 'social' events, however, two issues of the TILTAS journal were published at a cost of £949. The deficit of £1003 reduced the Society's balance to £5876.

### *6.2 2022 Actual*

Subscriptions continued to be suspended but, with the relaxation of Covid restrictions, three events were held at the Embassy in April, May and June. Richard Butterwick-Pawlikowski, John Whittingdale MP and Kathleen Soriano were the speakers. These events resulted in a deficit of £234.

General admin. costs were higher than usual due to the funding of meetings with the Lithuanian City of London Club and Lithuanian Association UK to investigate possible future collaboration.

Additionally, a sponsorship grant of £300 was made to the Baltic Council.

These expenditures total £895 – reducing the bank balance to £4981.

### *6.3 2023 Outlook*

Two grants have been made to The Baltic Council (re Symposium and Young Baltic Talent) - these total £600 and a further grant of £500 has been made to the UK Lithuanian Youth Association. The restoration of requests for membership income (to run until end 2024) is expected to generate about £1000 this year. Our projected bank balance at year end is expected to be about £4800

### *6.4 Accounts Examiners*

I am grateful to Grazina Thompson and Jamie Kirkwood for acting as Accounts Examiners for the past two years. While Grazina has indicated she will be happy to continue, I have not received similar confirmation from Jamie. However, I have contacted another member of the Society, Richard Vernick, who is a member of the Chartered Institute of Taxation and has agreed to stand in as an accounts examiner.

## **7.0 The Tiltas Trust (TTT) report (Tom Macan)**

Tom Macan, Chair of the Tiltas Trust, delivered the following report:

The Trust last reported to the BLS members in November 2020. This report covers developments since that date. The Trustees have not met physically during this period and have had, perforce, to conduct their business by email.

The Trust experienced a serious loss with the death in 2022 of Wendy Howe, one of our founder-trustees and the driving spirit behind many of our projects. Her network of friends and collaborators both in the UK and Lithuania played a key part in our work and I take this opportunity to pay tribute to her enormous contribution to the Trust.

In our 2020 report, we identified four projects which had to be put on hold because of the Covid pandemic. These were a one-week visit to St Anns' Hospice by volunteers from Tėviškės Namai in Alytus; facilitation on of a one-week internship in the UK for a Lithuanian palliative care specialist; attendance by a UK specialist at the Lithuanian Palliative Medicine Association's conference; and a UK placement for professional development with a UK hospital for a Lithuanian oncologist/haematologist. Sadly, none of the Lithuanian partners in these projects have got in touch to ask us to take the proposals forward.

In early 2022, the Trust was able to respond to a request from Tėviškės Namai for support for creating a garden in conjunction with their daycare and drop-in centre.

In 2021, Ieva Petkutė, with whom we had previously cooperated on various arts-for-health projects, got in touch for support for a dementia charity, Demencija Lietuvoje (DL), which she was seeking to establish. Unfortunately, the UK Alzheimer's Society (AS) were unable to help directly since they have withdrawn from international work. They did however authorise DL to draw on their printed material for literature for a Lithuanian audience, and their indication of the role of Alzheimer's Disease International (ADI) did lead to helpful assistance. A series of DL events held to mark Alzheimer's Month in 2021 received excellent media coverage.

Direct cooperation with the riding centre at Rumšiskės has fallen by the wayside, but we have continued to provide modest support to the Pranas Daunys School for visually-

impaired and autistic children to spend me with the horses there: some have been riding, for others simply being with or helping groom horses has been very effective.

The Trust has also helped Pranas Daunys School with funding for two remote-learning sessions provided by the UK's National Autism Society (NAS) to help teachers at the school address the difficult issues of teenage sexuality in autistic children. The school reports that these have been a real success in helping them develop their own approach.

The Duke of Edinburgh's International Award (IA), which has benefitted from modest TTT support over the years, has been a spectacular success story in Lithuania. Pranas Daunys School are now active participants in this and earlier this year TTT provided funding for some additional support needed for four students with particular disabilities.

At this point, the Trust faces an uncertain future. As I have observed before, we need to recruit new blood, both in the UK and Lithuania. The Trustees are currently considering the options, particularly how we engender more interest amongst Lithuanian third-sector organisations who can cooperate, and "build bridges" with UK counterparts. If we cannot do this, it may make best sense to dissolve the Trust and distribute our remaining assets amongst existing Lithuanian partners.

I record my thanks to my fellow-trustees and to Peter Howe who generously continues to manage our financial affairs.

## **8.0 Election of Committee for 2023–2024**

The Chair presented the three candidates for election to the Committee and to offices: David Clarke, Francis Young, and Darius Furmonavičius – with David Clarke to stand as Chairman and Francis Young to stand as Secretary. The Chair introduced the candidates and outlined their various qualifications, and Angus Murray seconded the appointment of the candidates. Since there were no further candidates standing for the committee, the general assent of the AGM was taken in lieu of a vote and the candidates were appointed, *nem. con.*

## **9.0 Appointment of Accounts Examiners for 2023**

Grazina Thompson and Richard Vernick were approved as accounts examiners by general assent of the AGM (see the Treasurer's Report at 6.0 above).

## **10.0 Any other business/discussion**

### *10.1 Nature of British-Lithuanian Society meetings*

Members noted that, while Zoom meetings are convenient, human contact and physical networking remain important, and asked the new committee to keep the need for balance between these types of events in mind. The Chair noted that many members do not live in London, thus imposing a constraint on in-person meetings; but he noted the importance of the social aspect of the Society for many members.

### *10.2 Request for a vote of thanks*

Members suggested a formal vote of thanks for Aleksas Vilcinskas and Simon Butt (see 10.5 below).

### *10.3 Sharing of member details*

It was noted that members used to be asked if they would consent to their details being shared with other members. The Chair read out the current disclaimer on the sharing of details that accompanies an application for membership of the Society.

#### *10.4 Potential future events in Oxford*

Brian Holmes noted that it might be possible for talks to be arranged by the Oxford Lithuanian Society, who could secure the use of a hall free of charge; there is also a possibility of guest speakers being accommodated overnight. There are a number of Lithuanian students in Oxford who could be encouraged to become members. The Chair thanked Mr Holmes for these suggestions.

#### *10.5 Votes of thanks*

The new Chair thanked everyone for attending, thanked the Lithuanian Embassy for very kindly hosting the meeting, and noted with thanks the contributions of departing committee members Prof. Richard Butterwick-Pawlikowski and Zita Čepaitė. The incoming Chair noted that outgoing Chair Simon Butt had served in the role for 11 years, and presented him with a bottle in token of the Society's appreciation. The new Secretary assured the AGM that a suitable token of the Society's thanks will also be sent to the outgoing Secretary Aleksas Vilcinskas.