

# Lithuania independence day

## A day to remember great Lithuanian countrymen

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I am grateful to The Japan Times for this opportunity to address its readers on the occasion of the 93rd anniversary of the declaration of the restoration of the state of Lithuania. This day is a symbol of our unity and protection of statehood, inseparable in respect to our history and every freedom fighter who brought us the opportunity to celebrate this solemn event today.



The year began with a series of events to commemorate the 20th anniversary of the Day of Defenders of Freedom. Let us remember: On Jan. 13, 1991, the Lithuanian people withstood Soviet aggression and secured their homeland's freedom only by the power of mind, and the

spirit of truth and love. Unarmed Lithuanians fought not only for their right to live in an independent and democratic state but also for the triumph of the fundamental values of democracy throughout Europe. The attempt to return Lithuania to the Soviet Union by force left 14 people dead and around 700 injured. But on that fateful night, Lithuania's victory sped up the transformation of the Soviet Union, and the backing provided by democratic governments and the international community prevented another closing of the Iron Curtain.

Since then, having restored its international role by joining the European Union and NATO in 2004, Lithuania actively participates in world politics.

This year my country is chairing the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), and will hand over the Community of

Democracies chairman's baton to Mongolia in July.

And in 2013, Lithuania will face perhaps the most important challenge since its accession to the EU, assuming the presidency of the Council of the European Union for the second half of the year.

On the cultural front, there are two notable anniversaries related to Lithuania with which UNESCO is associated: the 100th anniversary of the death of Mikalojus Konstantinas Ciurlionis and the 100th anniversary of the birth of Czeslaw Milosz.

The symbolist painter and composer Ciurlionis (1875-1911) is perhaps the most famous Lithuanian artist of all time. His work is a complex and versatile phenomenon not only in Lithuanian art but also in that of the whole of Eastern Europe at the turn of the 20th century. Having absorbed many of the qualities of the "fin de siecle" epoch, Ciurlionis' works con-



**Mikalojus Konstantinas Ciurlionis, the most famous Lithuanian artist**

centrated certain ideals belonging to the future modernism that at the time was not yet fully developed.

He was not only a painter and romantic, but a materialistic thinker, too. This is probably the reason why

now, 100 years after his death, the interest in his works is steadily increasing. They have been analyzed by various American, French, German, Russian, etc., critics, but even today, it is difficult to define Ciurlionis' art and attribute it to any particular European art movement. Some draw parallels between him and the futurists, surrealists or abstractionists; others call him the initiator of modernism and compare him to Wassily Kandinsky, Odilon Redon, Frantisek Kupka and Edvard Munch. His paintings have been displayed at international exhibitions in Europe, Japan and the United States.

Though he is better known as a painter, his musical heritage has had a profound influence on modern Lithuanian music. His discoveries in polyphonic composition technique place his name next to those of Fryderyk Franciszek (Frederic) Chopin, Jo-

hann Strauss and Alexander Nikolayevich Scriabin.

You would also probably find it interesting that Ciurlionis' name has been given to cliffs in Franz Josef Land, a peak in the Pamirs and to asteroid No. 2420.

Milosz (in Lithuanian Česlovas Milosas, 1911-2004), winner of the 1980 Nobel Prize in literature as well as of many other prestigious literary awards, was one of the greatest and most famous poets in the world. According to critics from many countries, his diversified works are one of the major phenomena of 20th-century literature. Being a Polish poet strongly dedicated to Polish society and language, he was born in Lithuania, and throughout all his life maintained strong emotional and cultural connections with his native country. However, Milosz emphasized his identity with the multiethnic Grand Duchy of Lithuania, and therefore re-

fused to identify himself as either a Pole or a Lithuanian, sparking certain controversies.

Coming from Eastern Europe, which was under Soviet dominance, he was the most important writer from that part of Europe who used his poetry to fight the totalitarian ideology and express his objection to the enslavement of man. As a novelist, Milosz won renown with his books about the violations of human rights committed by the totalitarian system in the Soviet-dominated states.

As a translator from many languages, he coped with all

literary tradition — from William Shakespeare through Japanese haiku poets to the Bible.

Finally, looking at the relations with Japan, I wish to bring to your attention two important dates on the diplomatic front. In October, the 20th anniversary of the restoration of diplomatic relations will be celebrated, and 2012 will be a call to remembrance of 90 years since Lithuania and Japan entered into formal relations, after Japan had officially recognized Lithuania four years after my country had restored its statehood.

**Congratulations  
on the Independence Day of  
the Republic of Lithuania**



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