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Book Review:

**Thomas Remeikis, *The Lithuanian Phoenix: Studies and Essays 1940–1990*.
Vilnius: Versus Aureus, 2009. ISBN: 978-9955-34-180-2.**

Reviewed by Virgil Krapauskas

Thomas Remeikis has had a long and distinguished career as a scholar serving academia and the Lithuanian-American community. Never an academic sitting in his ivory tower, his nine reports of the *Violation of Human Rights in Soviet Occupied Lithuania, 1977-1981* were instrumental in exposing the hypocrisy of the Soviet system. In fact, most of his academic work has contributed to the Diaspora's fight for Lithuanian freedom. *The Lithuanian Phoenix* is a collection of essays and articles written from 1965 to 1981 in their original form without notes or commentaries added from today's perspective. The title is somewhat misleading, for the actual time span covered is from the late thirties to early eighties. Remeikis wrote and studied in the period when Lithuania was under Soviet occupation, but he put that occupation into a historical context by going back to the thirties. The first two chapters deal with a history that blends domestic and foreign affairs of Lithuania leading to its incorporation into the Soviet Union. The middle chapters analyze the nationalism that reappeared after Stalin's death, and the last five chapters treat the rise of dissent in the Soviet Union in general and Lithuania specifically. Two chapters deal with the activities of the Helsinki group. In spite of their heroic efforts in combating violations of human rights by the Soviet Union, one may wonder today about the significance of this group in destroying the foundations of the Soviet Empire.

Besides doing original research on Lithuania in a time when that was virtually impossible, Remeikis was an original thinker who could glean and digest information from a closed system, explaining, and even predicting, the decline of the Soviet Empire. With a dearth of information, he suggested new areas of research such as "Why People Revolt," topics on concerns broader than Lithuania. Remeikis's articles are filled with statistical tables gathered from Western and Soviet sources. By today's standards and openness, the reliability of his evidence is very difficult to discern. Statements written in 1977 that "in many respects the Baltic Republics are economically leading republics of the Soviet Union and compare favorably with many developed Western countries" (244) sound dated today. Yet, during the dark days of occupation, Remeikis studied the Soviet system from a micro and macro view rather successfully.

Throughout his career, Remeikis remained essentially optimistic about Lithuania's fate. In opposition to many western Kremlinologists, whose analysis of events in the Soviet Union depended on who stood where atop Lenin's mausoleum, Remeikis's focus on Lithuania may have been more prescient as to the future of the USSR. From the sixties to the early eighties, when the Soviet Union looked like an eternal monolith, Remeikis saw signs of a declining Soviet Empire. He saw this decline not from Lenin's tomb but from the periphery of the Soviet Union – the Baltic States.

Never a determinist, Remeikis believed that Lithuanians could affect their destiny; they did not have to be passive pawns in the struggles of the great powers. In 1940, Lithuania's fortunes could have been different if the Lithuanian government had acted more decisively. Throughout the sixties, seventies, and eighties, when hope of regaining Lithuanian independence seemed unthinkable and naive, Remeikis believed that independence was not impossible. Small groups of dissidents who seemed more pathetic than threatening to Soviet power were also presaging independence. At a time when political oppression seemed most severe, Remeikis asserted that a "nationalist intelligentsia and the generally dissatisfied masses would provide the necessary elements for a political explosion if a severe crisis arose, a fact of tremendous importance for the West and of ominous significance for the Communist bloc." (110) In his most seminal article, entitled "Institutional Nationalism," he responded to the pronouncements of the Communist Party about the ultimate merger of nations with empirical data showing that much of the bargaining "between republic and federal authorities for allocation of resources" had a national dimension. After Stalin's death, ethnic Lithuanians in the Communist Party of Lithuania struggled with the Russians for a dominant role in Lithuania. Even the old-guard internationalists loyal to Moscow wanted to be masters of their own house, if for no other reason than economics.

This book is basically a reflection of a life's work by a wellknown Lithuanian-American political scientist. It does not add anything new to what he has already published, but it shows the evolution of a westerner's understanding of events that took place between 1938 and 1980. One hopes that this compilation will not be the last work in Remeikis's selfless scholarly career, which should continue with the opening and free access to archives.

Virgil Krapauskas