

= Council of Lithuania =

The Council of Lithuania (Lithuanian : Lietuvos Taryba , German : Litauischer Staatsrat , Polish : Rada Litewska) , after July 11 , 1918 The State Council of Lithuania (Lithuanian : Lietuvos Valstybės Taryba) , was convened at the Vilnius Conference that took place between 18 and 23 September 1917 . The twenty men initially composing the council were of different ages , social status , professions , and political affiliations . The council was granted the executive authority of the Lithuanian people and was entrusted to establish an independent Lithuanian state . On 16 February 1918 , the members of the council signed the Act of Independence of Lithuania and declared Lithuania an independent state based on democratic principles . 16 February is celebrated as Lithuania 's State Restoration Day . The council managed to establish the proclamation of independence despite the presence of German troops in the country until the autumn of 1918 . By the spring of 1919 , the council had almost doubled in size . The council continued its efforts until the Constituent Assembly of Lithuania (Lithuanian : Steigiamasis Seimas) first met on 15 May 1920 .

= = Historical background and Vilnius Conference = =

After the last Partition of the Polish @-@ Lithuanian Commonwealth in 1795 , Lithuania had become part of the Russian Empire . During the 19th century , both the Poles and the Lithuanians attempted to restore their independence . They rebelled during the November Uprising in 1830 and the January Uprising in 1863 , but the first realistic opportunity came about during World War I. In 1915 , Germany occupied Lithuania as its troops marched towards Russia . After the Russian Revolution in 1917 , opportunities for independence opened up . Germany , avoiding direct annexation , tried to find a middle path that would involve some kind of union with Germany . In the light of upcoming peace negotiations with Russia , the Germans agreed to allow the Vilnius Conference , hoping that it would proclaim that the Lithuanian nation wanted to be detached from Russia and wished for a closer relationship with Germany . However , the conference , held between 18 and 23 September 1917 , adopted a resolution that an independent Lithuania should be established and that a closer relationship with Germany would depend on whether it recognized the new state . On 21 September , the attendees at the conference elected a 20 @-@ member Council of Lithuania to establish this resolution . The German authorities did not allow that resolution to be published , but they did permit the council to proceed . The authorities censored the council 's newspaper , Lietuvos aidas (Echo of Lithuania) , preventing the council from reaching a wider public audience . The Conference also resolved that a constituent assembly be elected " in conformity with democratic principles by all the inhabitants of Lithuania " .

= = Membership = =

The twenty men initially composing the council were of different ages (the youngest was 25 ; the oldest 66) , social status , professions , and political affiliations . There were eight lawyers , four priests , three agronomists , two financiers , a doctor , a publisher , and an engineer . Eight of the members were Christian democrats and seven were not affiliated . All except one had gained degrees in tertiary education . The council 's last surviving member , Aleksandras Stulginskis , died in September 1969 .

During the first meeting on September 24 , Antanas Smetona was elected as the chairman of the council . The chairman , two vice @-@ chairmen , and two secretaries made up the presidium . The vice @-@ chairs and secretaries would change from time to time , but Smetona retained the chairmanship until 1919 when he was elected the first President of Lithuania . Smetona was succeeded by Stasys ?ilingas as the chairman . He was not among the original twenty members . The first change in membership took place on 13 July 1918 , when six new members (Martynas Y?as , Augustinas Voldemaras , Juozas Purickis , Eliziejus Draugelis , Jurgis Alekna and Stasys ?ilingas) were admitted and four (Kairys , Vilei?is , Bir?i?ka , Narutavi?ius) resigned . By the spring

of 1919 , the council had almost doubled in size .

= = Declaration of Independence = =

Soon after the council was elected , major developments took place in Russia . The October Revolution brought the Bolsheviks to power . They signed a truce with Germany on December 2 , 1917 and started peace negotiations . Germany needed some documentation of its relationship with Lithuania . In the so @-@ called Berlin Protocol Germany offered to recognize Lithuanian independence if the latter agreed to form a firm and permanent federation with Germany , based on conventions concerning military affairs , transportation , customs , and currency . The council agreed , on condition that Lithuania would decide its own internal affairs and foreign policy . The Germans rejected this proposal . On December 11 , the council adopted a resolution agreeing to a " firm and permanent alliance " with Germany on the basis of the four conventions . Only fifteen members voted for this resolution , but all twenty signed it .

The Germans broke their promise and did not recognize the state and did not invite its delegation to the negotiations of Treaty of Brest @-@ Litovsk . Lithuanians , including those living abroad , disapproved of the December 11 declaration . The declaration , seen as pro @-@ German , was an obstacle in establishing diplomatic relations with England , France and the United States , the enemies of Germany . On January 8 , the same day that Woodrow Wilson announced his Fourteen Points , the council proposed amendments to the declaration of December 11 calling for a constituent assembly . The amendments were rejected by the Germans and it was made clear that the council would serve only advisory functions . The council was torn apart and a few members threatened to leave . On February 16 , the council , temporarily chaired by Jonas Basanavi?ius , decided to re @-@ declare independence , this time mentioning nothing specific about a relationship with Germany . That was left for a constituent assembly to decide . February 16 is celebrated as Lithuania 's State Restoration Day .

= = Establishing independence = =

The Germans were not satisfied with the new declaration and demanded that the council go back to the December 11 decision . On March 3 , Germany and Bolshevik Russia signed the Treaty of Brest @-@ Litovsk . It declared that the Baltic nations were in the German interest zone and that Russia renounced any claims to them . On March 23 , Germany recognized independent Lithuania on the basis of the December 11 declaration . However , nothing in essence changed either in Lithuania or in Council 's status : any efforts to establish administration were hindered . The form of government , however , was left undecided . Germany , ruled by a kaiser , preferred a monarchy . It proposed a personal union with the Prussian Hohenzollern dynasty . As an alternative , on June 4 the council voted to invite Duke Wilhelm of Urach , Count of Württemberg , to become the monarch of Lithuania . He agreed and was elected King of Lithuania (Mindaugas II) on July 13 , 1918 . The decision was very controversial and four members of the council left in protest .

Germany did not recognize the new king and its relationship with the council remained tense . The council was not allowed to determine the borders of Lithuania , establish an embassy in Berlin , or begin forming a stable administrative system . It received small funds to cover its expenses only in September 1918 . The situation changed when the German Revolution started and Germany lost the war in fall of 1918 ? it was no longer in a position to dictate terms . On November 2 , the council adopted the first provisional constitution . The decision to invite King Mindaugas II was annulled and this helped to reconcile the political factions . The functions of government were entrusted to a three @-@ member presidium , and Augustinas Voldemaras was invited to form the first Cabinet of Ministers . The first government was formed on November 11 , 1918 , the day that Germany signed the armistice in Compiègne . The council began to organize an army , police , local government , and other institutions . It also expanded to include ethnic minorities (Jews and Belarusians) . There were no women in the council , despite a petition that gathered 20 @,@ 000 signatures .

The Freedom Wars started and political processes were derailed during the turmoil . Lithuanian

elections to the Constituent Assembly of Lithuania were not held until April 1920 . The council was not replaced by a parliament (Seimas) until August 1 , 1922 , when the Constitution of Lithuania was adopted .