

New Information and Dokumentation Centres in Lithuania

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In 1990 Lithuanian Republic acquired independence and became an object of interest for the governments of foreign states and international organisations. Among other activities that interest was expressed by establishing information and documentation centres or developing information services of certain states or organisations. The appearing centres may be differentiated into two groups: 1) serving for dissemination of information about culture and way of life of a country, 2) catering for special information needs of Lithuanian government and citizens. Some of these centres work as commercial ones.

International organisations were the first to start information and documentation activities in Lithuania. United Nations and UNESCO have chosen Vilnius University Library as the depository library as far as in 1965 (September). The key figure in creating this depository for Baltic (the Soviet) Republics was professor L. Vladimirovas who served as the director of UN D. Hammarskjöld library. The Nordic Council had established the Information centre in April, 1991. The European Union had chosen the Lithuanian National Martynas Mažvydas Library as the depository for its documents in March, 1992. The other international organisations that have their centres are: European Council, International Atomic Energy Agency, International Labour Organisation, World Health Organisation, the World Bank. It should be noted that the Information Centre of the Nordic Council of Ministers and the Information and Documentation and Centre on Council of Europe differs from the other ones. They are the autonomous institutions fully financed by

the international agencies and functioning according to their independent programmes. The other international organisations are sending the documents to the Lithuanian state institutions and supporting their information activities in respective fields.

The first foreign states to create information centres in 1992 were Norway and Great Britain (British Council). The British Council had established the English Language Teaching Resource centre that provides comprehensive reference and lending services for English language specialists. Norway started general information services on Norwegian culture and had developed as a specialised commercial information centre. The American Centre, French Oscar Milosz Centre, Japanese Information Centre and Danish Cultural Institute provide comprehensive information on state and national culture. Austria (Salzburg) has opened a Reading Room for Austrian literature. The specialised commercial and non-commercial information centres were opened by Open Society Fund – Lithuania (Law Library), United States (Business Information Centre), European Union (Euro Info Centre) and others.

The authors of the report have conducted a survey on the information resources, organisational structure, financing, functions, services and activities of those information centres. The data was gathered during the personal interviews with the heads of the institutions, by analysing their collections and documentation. The surveyed institutions pursue similar aims in Lithuania. However, their organisational structure and forms of activities vary greatly. That depends on technical and financial possibilities, professional qualification of the staff, political interests and resources of the institutions to which they belong.

Those centres have become an indispensable landmark on Lithuanian informational landscape. They have filled in the gaps of informational about Western countries and in foreign languages that was essential for a newly independent country seeking integration into international community. They have played an important role in education and research as well as in development of business relations. Besides, some of them have brought advanced information technology and gave Lithuanian users an access to modern information services. To some extent they have served an example

for Lithuanian libraries and information centres in providing an open access to their collections and data bases, have broadened their comprehension of information services.

At present the survey of the users of international and documentation centres is conducted by the authors. The main groups of users are: students, state officials, teachers and lecturers, researchers, retired persons, business-men. Their information needs are different. The survey should reveal the needs that are satisfied by those specific agencies and to define more precisely their place and role in Lithuanian information infrastructure.

Įteikta 1998 m. spalio mėn.