

Concept of Statehood by Lithuanian Historians-Politicians (1907-1918)

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Summary

The article deals with Lithuania's statehood in terms of how it was viewed by certain historians-politicians at the beginning of the 20th century, namely by P. Klimas, A. Voldemaras, I. Purickas, J. Šliūpas, and others. The analysis itself is based on the articles of the above mentioned historians-politicians as well as other historical studies, and it concentrates on the following issues: Lithuania's autonomy, its federation with Poland, the Lithuanian-Latvian state, the Lithuanian-Belarus state, a constitutional monarchy, and an independent nation state. The ideas of Lithuanian historians-politicians on these questions are compared to the ones held by the most eminent European researchers of nationalism. The author of the article claims that nationalism, as one of the forms of national ideology, sought for the best ways to ensure a nation's existence and overcome disagreements among nations. P. Klimas distinguished two types of nationalism: conquering nationalism (aggressive, chauvinist) as displayed in the Balkan Wars by the Ottoman Empire and liberating nationalism, striving for either national autonomy or independence as in the case of the nations of the Balkan peninsula. P. Klimas assigned the national movements of Lithuanians, Latvians, Byelorussians and Georgians to the second type, i.e. liberating nationalism. In his concept P. Klimas laid more emphasis on 'objective or ethnic factors' in national consciousness such as a nation's language, religion, customs, traditions, folklore, history, and common national ideals. From the theories of modern researchers on nationalism, who stressed the importance of 'ethnic factors' and argued that a nation can become independent on the basis of such factors, A. Smith's ethnicistic theory is closest to P. Klimas' concept of nationalism. A. Voldemaras' ideas on the national question are close to those of E. Gellner who stresses that primarily nationalism is a political principle. According to the author, the views of Lithuanian historians-politicians on the most appropriate form of government for the state of Lithuania were influenced by the internal and international political conditions of that period. Taking into account those conditions, they made several attempts to propose solutions ranging from the declaration of a constitutional monarchy to the creation of a democratic republic of Lithuania. Their opinions changed regarding the form of government. Finally, J. Purickis and A. Voldemaras agreed with the statements of P. Klimas and M. Biržiška that only one form of statehood was practicable at the beginning of the 20th century, i.e. the establishment of a democratic Republic of Lithuania.