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THE RELATIONS OF THE ANTANAS SMETONA REGIME WITH THE CATHOLIC OPPOSITION, 1929–32

Abstract

The article's main objective is to present the relationship between the Antanas Smetona regime and the Catholic opposition in 1929–32, and an evaluation of the repressive measures applied during this period. An analysis of various sources revealed that the actions of the right-wing nationalist government toward the Catholic opposition – which included the clergy, Catholic social organisations, and the Christian Democrats – were extremely harsh, significantly since the Catholic movement did not threaten the state sovereignty, public order, or political doctrine carried out by the Lithuanian president. The 1929–32 timeframe refers to the period of the greatest tension in the conflict between the Lithuanian government and the Catholic Church. The conflict between the Republic of Lithuania and the Vatican divided society, thus disrupting the existing positive diplomatic relations, which were reflected in the signing of the concordat in 1927.

Keywords: Catholic opposition, regime, Catholic Church, Christian Democrats, 'Ateitininkai', relations, repressions

I INTRODUCTION

The situation of the Catholic Church and the relations between the political establishment and Catholic organisations operating in Lithuania is a topic that has not been thoroughly analysed in the Lithuanian historiography of the interwar period. Among the most important works published thirty years since the proclamation of the Second Lithuanian Republic dealing with the issue are those by Dangiras Mačiulis, Algimantas Kasparavičius, Kęstutis Žemaitis,

Modestas Kuodys, and Artūras Svarauskas.¹ An extremely interesting and at the same time controversial period regarding these relations spans the years 1929–32, when the conflict between the right-wing nationalist government and the Catholic Church reached the highest level of tension, dividing society, disrupting the Kaunas–Vatican relationship, and deepening the Church’s ties with the Christian Democratic Party.²

The Catholic Church was the greatest ally of the Christian Democratic Party in the struggle against the Antanas Smetona regime, which was trying to legitimise the coup d’état carried out in December 1926.³ These aspirations were aided by the fact that the Christian Democrats supported the overthrow of the centre-left government, and their votes established the cabinet of Augustinas Voldemaras. However, in April 1927, after the Seimas passed a vote of no confidence in the government of Voldemaras, President Smetona decided to dissolve the Seimas and introduce authoritarian rule. In a way, the process of forming authoritarian rule in Lithuania was finalised when the Christian Democrats left the government coalition and demanded that new parliamentary elections be called.⁴

¹ Dangiras Mačiulis, ‘Moksleiviai ateitininkai nepriklausomoje Lietuvoje (1918–1940): veikimo laisvė ir politinis režimas’, *Bažnyčios istorijos studijos*, xxxii, 3 (2010), 37–133; Algimantas Kasparavičius, *Tarp politikos ir diplomatijos: Šventasis Sostas ir Lietuvos Respublika* (Vilnius, 2008); Kęstutis Žemaitis, ‘Lietuviškoji inteligentija neabejinga katalikiškajai akcijai (1918–1940)’, *Soter*, xxxiii, 5 (2001), 95–102; Modestas Kuodys, ‘Karo padėties represinių priemonių panaudojimas prieš katalikiškąją opoziciją Lietuvoje 1930–1932 m.’, *Soter*, lxxv, 47 (2013), 19–30; Artūras Svarauskas, *Kunigo M. Krupavičiaus opozicinė veikla valstybinei valdžiai (1927–1940 m.)* (Vilnius, 2005).

² Kasparavičius, *Tarp politikos ir*, 23.

³ On the night of 16–17 December 1926, officers of the Lithuanian armed forces carried out a coup d’état. The left-wing government and president Kazys Grinius were overthrown. The date of the coup was not chosen at random, as the head of state was celebrating his birthday on that day. As a result of the coup, power was seized by the army of the Kaunas garrison. After the coup, the most important positions in the state were parcelled out and full power was given to A. Smetona and A. Voldemaras. Meanwhile, the leading political activists of the centre-left government coalition were either arrested or placed under police and army surveillance. See Krzysztof Buchowski, ‘Dyktatura parlamentarna w stanie wyjątkowym. Litewski Sejm w latach 1920–1927’, *Przegląd Sejmowy*, 1 (2019), 43.

⁴ Piotr Łossowski, *Kraje bałtyckie na drodze od demokracji parlamentarnej do dyktatury (1918–1934)* (Wrocław, 1972), 122–5.

A conflict between the regime and the Church arose when President Smetona began to exert pressure on the opposition Christian Democratic Party, the Catholic organisations it supported, and the clergy. The regime publicly claimed that it was fighting only against the politicisation of priests and not against the Catholic faith, so it demonstratively tried to avoid violating the previously established principles of respect for religion and the provisions ensuring pastoral activities. In this way, the Catholic Church found itself in a whirlwind of political struggles.⁵

Researchers have so far delved into the political and legal aspects of the topic, paying much less attention to the judicial or administrative repressive measures used by the Smetona regime against the Catholic circles and to the mutual relations between the two sides of the conflict.⁶ As a result, the main aim of the article is to analyse the relations between the political regime and the Catholic opposition⁷ and to evaluate the repressive measures used during martial law to persecute the Catholic opposition during the formation of the political system of Lithuania in 1929–32.

The content of this article is based on historiographical materials, and primary sources, including documents from the Central State Archive of Lithuania (LCVA), as well as publications and scientific monographs.

II

CONCORDAT AS A WAY OF REGULATING STATE RELATIONS WITH THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH IN LITHUANIA

The year 1929 in the Republic of Lithuania was a period of Smetona's successful attempt to maintain the stability of the political system while striving to liquidate trade union and party pluralism in Lithuania

⁵ Mačiulis, 'Moksleiviai ateitininkai', 78.

⁶ In institutional terms, the political system refers to the cooperation of individuals, groups, and organisations as entities in political life influencing the implementation of norms and rules regulating the life of society: politics, culture, education, religion, law, etc.

⁷ The analysis will be based on the systemic approach and the concept of the American political psychologist Margaret G. Hermann, as well as taking into account the dynamic nature of the mechanisms of mutual interactions that take place between a political leader and his followers (i.e., elements of the political system); Margaret G. Hermann, 'Leaders, Groups and Coalitions: Understanding the People and Processes in Foreign Policymaking', *International Studies Review*, ii, 2 (2001), 83–8.

at the same time. The second wave of repression directed at the anti-system opposition resulted in large-scale searches carried out at the headquarters of the Lithuanian Social Democratic Party on 2 April 1929 and the arrest of several dozen oppositionists by the political police. As a result, fearing further repressions, the Party's Central Committee decided to suspend its activities entirely.⁸ Similar searches were also conducted at the headquarters of the People's Party.⁹

The stability of the political system in Lithuania was also influenced by the struggle of the Smetona regime with the strongest opposition party of Christian Democrats, which had a dominant role in Lithuania's political and social life from 1920 to 26. By breaking away from the Christian-Democratic coalition as early as 1927, Smetona was fully aware that he would gain the greatest rival on the Lithuanian political scene, and he consistently planned to marginalise the role of the Catholic Church (as well as Catholic social organisations) in the political system of Lithuania. It is worth mentioning that the president never officially spoke against the Catholic Church and its teachings, and the Smetona camp was composed of people from the circle of the clergy. The game between Smetona and the Christian Democrats was based solely on politics.

In Smetona's opinion, the conclusion of a concordat between the Holy See and Lithuania – even on terms favourable to the Catholic Church – could have been politically advantageous. Smetona was convinced that it would help him build an image of a government based on Catholic principles, which in the long run would enable him to increase his political influence, especially among the lowest social strata, which were under the influence of the largest opposition, the Catholic Christian Democrats.¹⁰

The first joint draft of an agreement between the ruling team and the Catholic Church in Lithuania resulted in the signing of a concordat in September 1927. The document prepared by Archbishop Juozas Matulaitis was consulted with Smetona and Voldemaras and was described as beneficial for both parties.¹¹ It is worth

⁸ Piotr Łossowski, *Litwa* (Warszawa, 2001), 128–9.

⁹ During one of the actions, the 'Varpas' printing plant belonging to the People's Party was blown up; *ibid.*, 128.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 130.

¹¹ *Vyriausybės Žinios*, no. 264 (20 Dec. 1927), 1708–13.

mentioning that Lithuanian leaders were inspired by the text of the Polish concordat.¹²

The regulations of the concordat clearly defined relations between the Church and the state in the initial period of systemic transformations, and their essence was expressed in Article 1 of this international agreement:

The Catholic Church, irrespective of the rites, shall use on the territory of the Republic of Lithuania all indispensable liberties that are necessary for the spiritual authority and exercising its own church jurisdiction, as well as for the management and care of its property in accordance with the commandments of God and the canons of law.¹³

After the concordat was published, it seemed to many citizens and observers of political life that the relations between the Church and the state were clearly and finally settled. The dominant opinion in the public discourse was nothing could harm the relationship between the state and the Church, especially since the nationalists, along with Smetona and Voldemaras, had just taken power in the country. In the initial period, the new government was believed to be much more sympathetic to the Catholic Church than the previous regime, consisting of members of the People's Party and Social Democrats. As Mykolas Romeris points out, during the period of Seimas, the Left downplayed the role and teaching of the Catholic Church,¹⁴ not being satisfied with its activity in the Lithuanian provinces.¹⁵

After the right-wing nationalist camp seized power in December 1926 – as Modestas Kuodys writes – both Smetona and Voldemaras strove to build a dictatorial system in which relations with society and Catholic circles would be based on the cult of the leader and the principles of leadership.¹⁶ The two leaders soon began to compete

¹² *Acta Apoctolicae Sedis*, xix (1927), 426–33; cf. *Acta Apostolicae Sedis*, xvii (1925), 274–87.

¹³ *Vyriausybės Žinios*, no. 264 (20 Dec. 1927), 1708.

¹⁴ Mykolas Romeris, *Lietuvos konstitucinės teisės paskaitos* (Vilnius, 1990), 209.

¹⁵ Steponas Matulis, *Lietuvos laisvės vainikas* (Nottingham, 1984), 63–4.

¹⁶ Kuodys, 'Karo padėties', 22; Dorota Maria Dzierżek, 'Antanas Smetona – litewski wariant przywództwa politycznego w systemie autorytarnym', in Wawrzyniec Konarski, Agnieszka Durska, and Szymon Bachrynowski (eds), *Kryzys przywództwa we współczesnej polityce* (Warszawa, 2011), 461–8. According to the classification of the types of political communication presented by Tomasz Goban-Klas, Smetona's

with each other, which in turn hurt the stability of the Lithuanian political system. Manifestations of this instability were observed both in the functioning of the legal system (infringement on civil rights and freedoms) and in international and social relations (e.g., the tension between Kaunas and the Vatican and the division of society).¹⁷

Despite the signing of the concordat, Smetona failed to win over Catholic circles. After the removal of Voldemaras from the political scene and the beginning of government repressions against his supporters, the Smetona regime began to take control of the Church's activities, as well as various Catholic organisations. The result of this situation was a conflict between Smetona and the Church, and the greatest tension between the government and the Church was observed in the Klaipėda region. The conflict was exacerbated when an attempt was made at the government level to reorganise Catholic schools and the Faculty of Theology and Philosophy of the University of Lithuania.¹⁸

Following Smetona's instructions, the military commanders tightened their grip on Catholic organisations, making it difficult to organise meetings or hold various events connected with the Catholic community. In response to the complaints from Catholic organisations, the military administration responded in a very formal manner, usually demonstrating the groundlessness of these organisations' activities.

From a political point of view, the introduction of martial law was, for Smetona, a convenient means of suppressing the opposition and state control. Attempts to express opposition to the Smetona regime, for example, in the press, were also unsuccessful, as this was prevented by military censorship.¹⁹

political communication with the society showed totalitarian tendencies, where at the beginning of his rule, the Lithuanian dictator attempted to establish interactions – personalising the regime, permanently binding his persona to the existing political system, in order to consolidate his position as a strong leader; Tomasz Goban-Klas, 'Wstęp', in Brian McNair, *Wprowadzenie do komunikowania politycznego*, transl. Dorota Piontek (Poznań, 1998), 9 [English edition: *An Introduction to Political Communication* (London–New York, 1995)].

¹⁷ Remeris, *Lietuvos konstitucinės teisės*, 212–42.

¹⁸ Ieva Šenavičienė and Antanas Šenavičius, *Vytauto Didžiojo universiteto struktūra 1922–1950 metais: genezė, raidosmetmenys* (Kaunas, 2002), 92–5; Kęstutis Žemaitis, 'Katalikiškas kraštas be katalikų universiteto?', *Soter*, xxxvi, 8 (2002), 49–55.

¹⁹ Kuodys, 'Karo padėties', 25.

III THE REGIME'S REPRESSIONS AGAINST THE CATHOLIC OPPOSITION DURING THE MARTIAL LAW

The regime of Antanas Smetona pushed the most active social forces, including the Church, to the margins of the political system. Of course, this was met with opposition from those, mostly opposition groups, who in various ways tried to publicise the greatest flaws of the authoritarian regime – the restrictions of democratic freedoms or citizens' rights.²⁰ The Centre for Catholic Action [Katalikiškoji Akcija Lietuvoje], operating under the auspices of the Christian Democrats, played an important role in this respect.²¹ The activities of the Centre for Catholic Action amounted to the part of the supervisor and coordinator of many different social, cultural, and charitable Catholic organisations and associations. As noted by Piotr Łossowski, the Centre for Catholic Action brought together many different Catholic organisations and associations. Rural youth concentrated around the cultural and educational centre 'Pavasario federaciją', and the working class was active in the St Joseph's Association. There were many Christian-social organisations for men and women. It is worth noting that great importance was also attributed to the Catholic press, which emerged over time and around the opposition circles gathered.²²

These organisations united a group of the Lithuanian intelligentsia (including professors Pranas Kuraitis, Stasys Šalkauskis, Pranas Dovydaitis, Juozas Eretas, and many others)²³ and were involved in the education of youth and adults, social activities, offered lectures and courses for city and village dwellers, established libraries, and disseminated the Catholic press.²⁴

Among the various Catholic and cultural organisations, the Lithuanian Catholic youth organisation 'Ateitininkai' [Federation for the Future], founded in 1911 by the Lithuanian youth movement, deserves special attention. Many Lithuanian pupils, students and graduates joined the groups of *ateitininkai* (adherents of 'Ateitininkai', whose

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 22.

²¹ Žemaitis, 'Lietuviškoji inteligentija', 95–100.

²² Łossowski, *Litwa*, 129.

²³ Kęstutis Žemaitis, 'Bažnyčios ir valstybės santykiai Lietuvoje 1918–1940 metais', *Soter*, xxxii, 4 (2000), 24.

²⁴ A. Šablinskas, *Kūrybinis katalikų veikimas* (Kaunas, 1939), 32–41.

name comes from the journal *Ateitis*). They were active in the cultural, religious, and social spheres. They organised rallies, courses, and congresses. The most important ideologue of the organisation was Stasys Šalkauskis, who, in the book titled *Ateitininkų ideologia*, formulated the principles of the activity of *ateitininkai*, pointing to the building of the religious identity of Lithuanians and their education as its goal. Members of the organisation supported the Christian Democrats.

With the growth of many Catholic organisations, the Christian Democrats significantly strengthened their influence in Lithuanian cities and provinces.²⁵ Meanwhile, when the military commanders by administrative means (e.g., financial penalties) significantly restricted the possibility of criticising the authorities and expressing opinions in the press, and at assemblies, church pulpits became the only place where the public could hear words of opposition to the official line of Smetona's rule. According to the reports of the political police and military commanders, in 1929–32,²⁶ the speeches of the clergy condemned the censorship of martial law, the suppression of Catholic organisations, and the persecution of their activists.²⁷

At the end of 1929 and in early 1930, the Catholic Action, taking advantage of the split in the ruling regime and the temporary political instability (caused by the removal of Voldemaras from the post of prime minister), initiated large-scale propaganda activities aimed at condemning Smetona's repressions against the Church and religion. Such actions were carried out, in particular, in educational institutions. The issue became public when at the beginning of 1930, Father Alfonsas Varnas organised a political rally in Kaišiadorys, during which he publicly criticised Smetona's authoritarian regime, pointing out its shortcomings. The speech was very important for the democratic opposition due to its strong propaganda overtone. The successfully initiated anti-system propaganda developed dynamically. One can formulate a thesis that, at that time, the Christian Democrats no longer only wanted to work out a compromise through concessions but also to eliminate the Smetona regime once and for all and to restore the previous political system.

²⁵ Łossowski, *Litwa*, 130–1.

²⁶ Lietuvos Centrinis Valstybės Archyvas (hereinafter: LCVA), F. 923. Ap. 1. B. 567a., 1928, Politinės policijos pažymą „apie kunigų prieš valstybinį veikimą“, 39–42.

²⁷ LCVA.F. 394. Ap. 4. B. 255. L. 146, 13 Nov. 1930, Katalikų veikimo centro Panevėžio valdybos aplinkraštis skyriams.

In the face of the increased activity of the Catholic circles, the regime undertook further, even harsher measures to completely subjugate the church hierarchy. In the first place, the Nationalist Party Minister of Education, Konstantinas Šakenis, on 30 August 1930, with Circular 244, abolished all *ateitininkai* units in Lithuania. Despite this decision, the 'Ateitininkai' continued to function in higher education, as did the 'Sendraugiai' [Friends] – a union of Lithuanian school graduates. Šakenis' next step was to ban activities of student ideological organisations, including 'Ateitininkai', in comprehensive schools on 3 September 1930.²⁸ Such a decision of the public authorities was contrary to the Concordat and the Constitution of 1928.²⁹ It should be noted that 'Ateitininkai' was the most active and influential Christian youth initiative in the history of Kaunas Lithuania. Therefore, it was not in the interest of the nationalists.³⁰

In President Smetona's opinion, Catholic youth organisations, in the strict sense, played a political role in the Lithuanian state that was unfavourable to the regime. Smetona identified them with one of the many political, anti-system forces that could play an important role in the education of youth, which in turn might not be conducive to his political interests.³¹

According to the assessment of the Lithuanian philosopher of existentialism Juozas Girnius, this perception of the regime characterises the basic doctrine of Smetona's authoritarian regime – the identification of national unity with the ruling party.³² It was no coincidence that in July 1930, the leader of the Nationalist Party Jonas Lapėnas suggested to Smetona that the nationalist camp should be transformed into a formal ruling party.³³

²⁸ Kęstutis Skrupskelis, *Ateities draugai. Ateitininkų istorija (iki 1940 m.)* (Vilnius, 2010), 588–617.

²⁹ Lietuvos Valstybės Konstitucija su paaiškinimais, Kaunas, 1922, X sk. Plg. Lietuvos Valstybės Konstitucija, Kaunas – Marijampolė, 1928, X sk.

³⁰ According to Mačiulis, the Smetona regime was afraid that political opponents of the Christian Democrats might use the potential of 'Ateitininkų' in the future, in a political struggle against his regime; Mačiulis, 'Moksleiviai ateitininkai', 37–50.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 62; see A. Rate, 'Katalikų jaunimo tiesūs keliai', *Rytas* (14 Jan. 1929), 1.

³² Juozas Girnius, *Pranas Dovydaitis* (Chicago, 1975), 203–13.

³³ Liudas Truska, 'Lietuvių tautininkų sąjunga apie autoriteto svarbą tautos gyvenime', *Lietuvos istorijos metraštis* 1995, v (1996), 267–92.

However, Smetona rejected the party dictatorship model, introducing a type of regime of authoritarian 'depoliticisation' of Lithuanian society.³⁴ Due to his lack of charismatic qualities and thus his inability to captivate crowds, Smetona decided to establish his system on a foundation and measures of an administrative nature, emphasising the technical aspects of state management.

IV

THE AUTHORITARIAN MODEL OF ANTANAS SMETONA'S STATE IN POLITICAL PRACTICE

President Antanas Smetona, discouraging the Lithuanian citizens from participating in political life, decided to appreciate all those who acted solely for the benefit of the new state and contributed to the fight against undesirable anti-system elements (including the Catholic Church and political opposition). As a result of this approach of the head of state, those who actively worked for the regime were frequently employed in the state administration.³⁵ According to the Smetonian model of authoritarianism, Lithuanian society was supposed to display patriotic and nationalistic tendencies.

From 1930 on, the Lithuanian Nationalists Union officially became a political structure whose role was merely to act as an intermediary between the government and the people. The party's main task was to prepare the cadres to fill the positions of the state administration. The desire to advance their professional careers led many Lithuanians to join the civil services, whose task was to ensure the efficient functioning of the highly centralised administrative apparatus. The regime's goal was to activate citizens (especially young people) and to carry out such activities that supporters of the regime would be present in various areas of social life, which, in turn, would allow further systemic changes to be introduced.³⁶

³⁴ It is worth referring here to the typology of authoritarian regimes by Juan J. Linz, who divided them into depoliticising and mobilising citizens; see Piotr Tarczyński, 'Przywódstwo w autorytaryzmie iberyjskim', in Bohdan Szklarski and Maciej Słęcki (eds), *Autorytaryzmy iberyjskie – Hiszpania Franco i Portugalia Salazara* (Warszawa, 2010), 25–6.

³⁵ A. Smetona, *Rinktiniai raštai*, ed. Alfonsos Eidintas (Vilnius, 1990), 458.

³⁶ Mačiulis, 'Moksleiviai ateitininkai', 71.

The next step was the implementation of the model of the nation-state, imposing from above the need to introduce Lithuanian patriotism and educate citizens in the national spirit. It should be noted that the government press more strongly propagated the model of the authority of the nation's leader and president, and promoted the idea of a state without parliament, which was aimed at a deep and universal indoctrination of citizens.³⁷

At the end of 1930, a modified doctrine of Smetona's authoritarianism was finally adopted, which focused exclusively on the identification of the nation with the leader, his thought, will, conscience, and faith (leaving aside the party). Such arrangements established a specific type of interaction between Smetona and the people, stemming from the personal nature of the Lithuanian autocracy. Thus, the people were required to accept unconditionally the actions taken by the president and his regime.³⁸

The slogan 'The leader is always right' was promoted in the government press.³⁹ Referring to the typology of Juan Linz and Alfred Stepan, the Smetona regime can be characterised as a sultanic regime,⁴⁰ i.e., a system of highly personalised governance, the implementation of which was marked by the highest level of arbitrariness.⁴¹

According to Smetona, the identification of Lithuanian society with its leader could occur when the undesirable anti-system elements (Christian Democratic opposition and the Church) were eliminated, and when the pro-church circles were weakened. Actions were taken to, among other things, liquidate the weekly meetings of Christian Democrats and dissolve the 'Ateitininkai' organisation.⁴²

Meanwhile, the regime press actively provoked, supported and justified the repressions against the opposition and the Church. This was aided by the dissemination of slogans that portrayed the opposition circles in a negative light and accused them of "defaming

³⁷ M. Kundrotas, 'Antanas Smetona – signataras, tautininkas, prezidentas', [www.alkas.lt](http://alkas.lt). <http://alkas.lt/2014/12/03/m-kundrotas-antanas-smetona-signataras-tautininkas-prezidentas> [Accessed: 31 Jan. 2020].

³⁸ Dzierżek, 'Antanas Smetona', 463.

³⁹ Girnius, *Pranas*, 412.

⁴⁰ Juan J. Linz and Alfred Stepan, *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation: Southern Europe, South America, and Post-Communist Europe* (Baltimore, 1996), 87.

⁴¹ Juan J. Linz, *Totalitarian and Authoritarian Regimes* (Boulder, 2000), 181–2.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 413.

the government”, “polarising and weakening the unity of the Lithuanian nation”, and “failing to comply with the rules established by the representatives of the central authorities”.⁴³ These actions were intended to create a false impression that the military administration was continuing repression and strengthening the authoritarian power system to combat religious and political extremists who posed a threat to state security.⁴⁴ Such actions served Smetona’s policy, which fuelled citizens’ fears and influenced the creation of an anti-Catholic narrative, which was to be the only response to the ideological justifications of the petrification of the political system.

In September 1930, at the height of the conflict between the Smetona regime and the Christian Democrats, the government began to use police and administrative restrictions more and more. By order of the Minister of National Defence, the political police closed down the meetings organised by the Christian Democrats,⁴⁵ and military censorship began to destroy the largest press organ of Christian Democrats – the daily *Rytas*, making it difficult to distribute, print, or procure accepted articles. Much of the material was also censored, each time fining the editorial office.⁴⁶

Moreover, the role of the Christian Democrats was marginalised at various levels, especially at the local level. To this end, it was decided to immediately proceed with drafting an amendment to the Act of 2 May 1931 on the electoral system in local elections. According to the new law, the local self-government has lost its complete autonomy and was directly subordinated to the Ministry of the Interior. The Ministry appointed heads of counties, who presided over the county councils and were at the same time electors in electing the head of state.

In this way, local governments became a pillar of the authoritarian regime, and further terror was to transform the Lithuanian population by physically eliminating undesirable elements – the regime’s opponents. These were in the broadly understood scope: communists,

⁴³ LCVA. F. 399. Ap. 1. B. 622, 69, 8 Oct. 1930, Vidaus reikalų ministerijos Piliečių apsaugos departamento aplinkraščio apskričių viršininkams nuorašas.

⁴⁴ Kuodys, ‘Karo padėties’, 22–3.

⁴⁵ LCVA. F. 1126. Ap. 2. B. 112, 2, 7 Feb. 1930, Katalikų veikimo centro vyriausios valdybos raštas krašto apsaugos ministrui.

⁴⁶ LCVA. F. 1126. Ap. 2. B. 113, 44, 13 Feb. 1931, *Ryto* redaktoriaus skundas Kauno karo komendantui.

democrats, Voldemaras' supporters and the clergy with the Christian opposition of the newly formed Lithuania in every possible sphere.⁴⁷

However, with President Smetona's term of office coming to an end, on 25 November 1931, the dictator announced a law on presidential elections, the provisions of which enabled his re-election.

The Christian Democrats, supported by church circles, protested the adopted laws and the new way of holding the presidential elections. The hierarchs of the Catholic Church decided to publish a pastoral letter condemning the regimes' reforms and repressions.

It is worth noting that only the priest Varnas mentioned above gave a speech in Kaunas, in which he called for active resistance to the Smetona regime. As a result, Father Varnas was arrested. After a failed attempt by the Church hierarchy to verbally protest and the arrest of Father Varnas, a conference of Lithuanian bishops was held in Kaunas on 16 September 1931, during which the regime was condemned for violating the concordat. Consequently, the Archbishop and Apostolic Nuncio Riccardo Bartoloni decided to write a complaint to the Holy See. This resulted in a visit by Bishops Antanas Karosas and Justinas Staugaitis to obtain appropriate clarifications from the president. The visit of the Church hierarchs did not bring the expected results, and the interlocutors did not manage to reach a consensus. Smetona expressed no desire to work out a compromise in the conflict with the Church. The efforts of the Holy See to develop a specific *modus vivendi* in mutual relations with the regime ended with Smetona ordering Archbishop Riccardo Bartoloni to leave Lithuania within 24 hours. Other activists and clergy of the Catholic Church, including the three main leaders of the Lithuanian Catholic movement, Juozas Eretas, Jonas Leimonas and Pranas Dovydaitis, were sent to the concentration camp in Vorna.⁴⁸

It is worth noting that the Catholic Church did not react to the above events. The Vatican resorted only to calling on the Lithuanian government to stop such actions, to which the Lithuanian side did not respond.⁴⁹

The conflict between the regime and the Catholic Church persisted until the end of the collapse of the Lithuanian state (1940). While the political system continued to remain stable, the balance of power

⁴⁷ Raimundas Lopata, *Autoritarinis režimas tarpukario Lietuvoje: aplinkybės, legitimumas, koncepcija* (Vilnius, 1998), 99.

⁴⁸ Vitautas Žalys, *Lietuvos diplomatijos istorija (1925–1940)*, i (Vilnius, 2006), 555–7.

⁴⁹ Steponas Malulis, *Lietuva ir Apaštalu sostas 1795–1940*, iv (Roma, 1961), 173.

and mutual relations between the regime and the Church and the Christian Democrats (Catholic opposition) remained deadlocked.⁵⁰ The Smetonian regime allowed minimal political pluralism. The Christian Democratic Party was in a semi-legal status, staying severely weakened, controlled, and repressed.

V

REPRESSIONS AGAINST OPPONENTS OF THE REGIME

The repressions affected not only the Church and Catholic organisations or press offices, but also citizens under surveillance by the political police subjected to the regime. Citizens were punished for conducting anti-government agitation by imposing fines ranging from several dozen to several hundred litas, although the maximum provided for in the bill on the protection of the Lithuanian state was 5,000 litas. Depending on the size, the fine could be replaced by an administrative arrest (maximum length – 3 months).⁵¹

Such a punishment was meted out in 1932 to Pranas Dovydaitis and Juozas Eretas, lecturers in the Faculty of Theology and Philosophy of the Vytautas Magnus University.⁵² The most influential figures from the Catholic opposition usually found money to pay off their penalties, but in many cases, they could not avoid imprisonment. The law regulating martial law specified several cases in which persons threatening ‘national security’ and ‘public order’ could be isolated. Representatives of the Catholic opposition were classified as second-class citizens and as troublemakers and provocateurs.

The military commanders, with the consent of the Minister of Defence, could intern the most active activists – Christian democrats – for several months in a forced labour camp or hold them in the provinces under the supervision of the local police for the entire duration of martial law.⁵³

The forced labour camp in Vorna (Varniai), which had been operating since 1927 and in which activists from the Polish community and

⁵⁰ Łossowski, *Litwa*, 132.

⁵¹ Svarauskas, *Kunigo*, 505–6.

⁵² Girnius, *Pranas*, 213.

⁵³ Modestas Kuodys, *Varniai, Dimitravas, Pabradė: koncentracijos ir priverčiamoji darbo stovyklos Lietuvoje 1927–1940 m.* (Vilnius, 2007).

Smetona's political opponents were placed, was temporarily closed in 1930–1. Forced labourers were imprisoned in the 300-person camp, which Lithuanian historiography referred to as a "concentration camp" because the imprisoned were physically concentrated in one place. In addition to the incarcerated leaders of Catholic *ateitininkai* organisations such as Adolfas Damušis, Juozas Meškauskas, Jonas Štaupas, prominent activists of the Christian Democratic Party were also imprisoned, including former finance minister Petras Karveliszczy and press spokesman and former diplomat Eduardas Turauskas.⁵⁴

Visible criticism of the actions taken by the government ultimately resulted in the reversal of the decision to intern the clergy in the labour camp. This was the result of some behind-the-scenes activities. Following the regime's instructions to suppress Catholic opposition as quickly as possible, the military commanders established military courts. In contrast to administrative penalties, judicial procedures were more complex and required more serious evidence. Lithuanian society at the time was aware that the courts often handed down death sentences for anti-state activities.⁵⁵ Liudas Truska, a researcher of recent history, estimated based on archival materials that from September 1930 to 1932, 146 clergymen (constituting 15.5 per cent of the total) were brought to justice for their anti-government activities. Two hundred sixty-two cases were brought against them before a military court – 60 defendants were given various penalties.⁵⁶

The harsh coercive measures applied in 1930–2 against members of the Lithuanian Christian Democratic Party and its supporters were similar (sometimes even stricter) to those from 1927–9.

Analysing the regime's relations with the Catholic Church in Lithuania, one can conclude that Smetona's regime regulated these relations similarly to how it was done in fascist Italy – from a position of force, without considering the counterarguments of the other party. As a result, the pressure on the Catholic opposition in Lithuania only intensified. This was evidenced by the fact that during the initial period of systemic change in the country, the war commanders were called upon to take more decisive action against the clergy, which

⁵⁴ Skrupskelis, *Ateities draugai*, 618–67.

⁵⁵ *1919–1929 Kariuomenės Teismas* (Kaunas, 1930), 33–50.

⁵⁶ Liudas Truska, 'Antanas Smetona', in Algimantas Liekis (ed.), *Lietuvos prezidentai* (Vilnius, 1997), 241.

in the regime's opinion, polarised society and undermined the new political system.⁵⁷

When characterising the Smetonian regime in relation to Catholic and opposition circles, it should be stated that it was a consolidated and institutionalised authoritarian system that emerged as a result of the democratic crisis and the coup d'état. It was based on various forms of control, legitimacy, and ideology, including democratic procedures, but it limited political freedoms and relied on the support of bureaucratic and military structures that fought the opposition in various ways.

VI CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, it should be noted that although after the December coup, the Christian Democratic Party initially supported the aspirations of the leaders of the Nationalist Party, Smetona and Voldemaras, in 1927, its position changed dramatically. At that time, there were indications that the nationalists wanted to govern independently without calling new parliamentary elections. Smetona aspired to strengthen his political camp and position in the power system. For this reason, the president, using the instruments of control over public life, legally provided to him during the martial law, decided to severely limit the activities of Catholic organisations supported by the Christian Democratic Party. This kind of oppression took the most severe form in 1930–32.

It should be noted that the Smetona regime applied inadequately harsh coercive measures against the Catholic opposition, even though the latter did not pose a major threat to the president's dictatorship. The most effective and most frequently used sanctions included fines, detention, or deportation to distant Lithuanian counties.

Persecuted by the regime, leaders of the Catholic opposition, as well as representatives of the clergy, tried to convey information about the situation in the country publicly, openly criticising the government's actions and emphasising that not only the rules of the concordat with the Vatican were being violated but also that inappropriate means

⁵⁷ LCVA. F. 1126. Ap. 2. B. 112, 60, 5 Dec. 1930, Kriminalinės policijos direktoriaus J. Navako raštas Karostovio reikalų referent iplk. V. Braziulevičiui.

were being used to fight citizens who expressed their opposition to the authorities.

As a result, the Smetonian regime brought the role of the Catholic opposition to the margins of political life, which affected the effectiveness of the petrification of the political system, making it stable and allowing authoritarianism to be consolidated.

transl. Sylwia Szymańska-Smolkin

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