

SAULIUS STANAITIS, DARIUS ČESNAVIČIUS

VILNIUS PEDAGOGICAL UNIVERSITY, LITHUANIA

## DYNAMICS OF NATIONAL COMPOSITION OF VILNIUS POPULATION IN THE 2<sup>ND</sup> HALF OF THE 20<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY

DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.2478/v10089-010-0003-4>

**ABSTRACT.** The article presents changes of national composition of Vilnius population in the 2<sup>nd</sup> half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The changes of Vilnius population are analyzed with respect to nationality, including the smallest territorial administrative units of Vilnius. The growth of the city population was associated with an intensive all-round city development. Based on the data of the censuses of 1989 and 2001, the article focuses on the dynamics of national composition, which took place after the restoration of independence. The analysis encompasses not only the intensity of dynamics of different nationalities but also the portion of national minorities residing in Vilnius (Poles and Russians in particular) on a country scale.

**KEY WORDS:** Lithuania, Vilnius, Lithuanians, Poles, Russians, population dynamic in Vilnius, national groups of Vilnius population, national composition of Vilnius population.

### INTRODUCTION AND SELECTION OF STATISTICAL DATA

Vilnius is Lithuania's capital but also the largest city of the country and its main centre of economic, political, and cultural life. The past of the capital, like that of the country in general, was difficult and included many tragic periods. The first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was especially hard time for the city. It was devastated by two world wars, and suffered tsarist Soviet occupations. The administrative status of the city, political system, and the number of population changed a few times.

In the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the city was rapidly rebuilt and expanded and after regaining the status of the capital of Lithuania its population has been steadily increasing. The national composition of Vilnius population has changed. After World War II, representatives of various nationalities moved to

the depopulated city. There remained a few old local Vilnius residents. Especially marked changes of some national groups took place in the last decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century after the restoration of independence. The present article represents a discussion of the dynamics of national composition of Vilnius city in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

The most reliable data about the national composition are obtained during population censuses. The author used the data of the 5 last (1959, 1970, 1979, 1989, and 2001) population censuses (Statistikos..., 2000) and statistical data for the current year (2009). Not all mentioned censuses were correct and exhaustive. The data of the first three censuses (Centrinė..., 1963; Centralnoje..., 1973, 1980) are rather loose whereas the data of 1989 and 2001 are full-scale (Statistikos..., 1991, 2002).

Based on the data of the censuses of 1989 and 2001, the article focuses on the dynamics of national composition, which took place after the restoration of independence. The analysis encompasses not only the intensity of dynamics of different nationalities but also the portion of national minorities residing in Vilnius (Poles and Russians in particular) on a country scale.

### PATTERNS OF POPULATION DYNAMICS

During 1950–1989, the total population number of Vilnius and other cities increased equally, i.e., by 3.4 times. Meanwhile, in the same time span, the number of rural population reduced by more than one third. The number of Vilnius population was rapidly increasing in the first years after the war. The national composition of the population changed. Not only Lithuanians but also Russians, Byelorussians, Ukrainians, and persons of other nationalities moved to Vilnius in the stead of Jews, who had been killed during the war, and Poles, who emigrated after the war. Most rapidly Vilnius population was increasing in the seventh and eighth decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century by 12–13 thousand every year (Lietuvos..., 1990; Statistikos..., 2002). The growth of the population was associated with an intensive all-round city development. It was predetermined by natural and migration increments. The role of the migration increment was decisive. Usually it accounted for about two thirds of the total population increase (Stanaitis, 1971; Stanaitis, Stankūnienė, 1981).

The population growth that lasted throughout the Soviet years stopped after the restoration of Lithuania's independence. Before 1991, Vilnius population had been steadily increasing and in 1991 it reached its maximum of 591.9 thousand people. In the last two decades (1989–2009), Vilnius population has been steadily decreasing (by 35.7 thousand or 6.5% in 20 years) though the reduction rates were

the slowest among other largest Lithuanian cities (Table 1). In recent years, the highest rates of depopulation have been observed in the second largest Lithuanian city, Kaunas, which has lost as much as 17.1% of its population. It is followed by Šiauliai (–15.0%) and Panevėžys (–12.3%) (Table 1). The depopulation after the restoration of independence (1990) was predetermined by emigration. In the first years after the restoration of independence, Russian-speaking citizens emigrated from Vilnius to the former Soviet Union. In later years, people of different nationalities emigrated to the West. Besides, some families moved to other Lithuanian areas, especially to rural localities.

Table 1. Changes in the number of the population in 1950–2009

City	Number of population, thousand			Change, %	
	1950	1989	2009	1950–1989	1989–2009
Vilnius	171.4	582.5	546.8	+339.8	–6.5
Kaunas	159.0	412.6	352.3	+259.5	–17.1
Klaipėda	50.1	204.2	183.4	+407.6	–11.3
Šiauliai	44.2	145.1	126.2	+328.3	–15.0
Panevėžys	35.7	126.4	112.6	+354.1	–12.3
Alytus	11.7	73.1	67.5	+624.8	–8.3
Marijampolė	15.5	50.6	46.7	+326.5	–8.4
Other cities	241.9	892.3	805.1	+368.9	–10.8
Total urban population	729.5	2,486.8	2,240.6	+340.9	–11.0
Total population	2,573.4	3,674.8	3,350.1	+142.8	–9.7

Source: own compilation on the basis of data of the Department of Statistics to the Government of the Republic of Lithuania as the Central Statistical Office's (<http://www.stat.gov.lt>). *Basic information from the 1989 National Census of the Population*

### DYNAMICS OF THE LARGEST NATIONAL GROUPS

Vilnius has always been a multi-national city yet the proportions of the largest national groups in it have varied. The population of those national groups also has varied: some national groups have reduced considerably, some others increased. The dynamics of the national composition of the city was predetermined by political circumstances and administrative subordination.

Usually, the absolute majority of Vilnius population would be composed of representatives of 2 or 3 nationalities. In 1897, they were Jews and Poles, in 1931 Poles and Jews, in 1942 Poles and Lithuanians (Eberhardt, 1997). Similar dynamic pattern of the ratio between national majorities of Vilnius was characteristic of the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Throughout the Soviet years, representatives of three nationalities dominated in Vilnius: Lithuanians, Russians and Poles. The

ratio of these national groups was constantly changing yet they were always in the absolute majority. In 1959, they accounted for 83.0%, in 1997 for 87.5 %, and in 2001 for 90.5% of the total population.

At the end of World War II, people of different nationalities moved to depopulated Vilnius: mainly Russians, Lithuanians, Byelorussians, and representatives of other Soviet nationalities. The changes of the national composition of the city after the war were reflected by the first population census in 1959. In later years, the national composition of Vilnius continued to change at slower rates.

Throughout the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the number of Lithuanians has been increasing in Vilnius (Table 2). Today, their portion approaches 60%. The permanent growth of the number of Lithuanians is associated with Vilnius development as a capital and strengthening of national identity. In 1959–2001, the number of Lithuanians increased by 234.0 thousand, from 79.4 to 313.4 thousand or by 3.9 times. The number of Lithuanians also was increasing in the last decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century though the total number of population reduced. The rapid development of the city in the first years of the 21<sup>st</sup> century will increase its population in the future.

Table 2. Percentage of different nationalities in Vilnius

Nationality	1959	1970	1979	1989	2001
Lithuanians	33.6	42.8	47.3	50.5	57.8
Russians	29.4	24.5	22.2	20.2	14.0
Poles	20.0	18.3	18.0	18.8	18.7
Byelorussians	6.2	6.5	6.4	5.3	4.0
Ukrainians	2.8	2.5	2.3	2.3	1.3
Jews	7.2	4.4	2.3	1.6	0.5
Tartars	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.2
Others nationalities	0.8	0.8	1.3	1.1	3.6
Total	99.2	99.2	98.7	98.9	96.4

Source: data of the Department of Statistics to the Government of the Republic of Lithuania as the Central Statistical Office's (<http://www.stat.gov.lt>). *Basic information from the 1989 and 2001 National Censuses of the Population*

Russians accounted for the largest part of Vilnius population in the first years after the war. In 1959, they accounted for 29.4% of the total. In later years, the portion of Russians had been reducing though their number during the time frame 1959–1989 increased by 47.2% (Table 2). In 1989–2001, the number of Russians rapidly reduced (-40.8 thousand) what was related with their movement from Lithuania after the restoration of independence.

Throughout the Soviet years, persons of Polish nationality were the third largest national group of Vilnius. In 1959–1989, the number of Poles in the

city increased by 61.0 thousand or by 2.1 times. In 1989–2001, emigration and assimilation reduced the number of Poles only by 6.7 thousand. In 2001, for the first time in the post-war years Poles represented the second largest national group of Vilnius (18.7% of the total).

## DYNAMICS OF OTHER NATIONAL GROUPS

Byelorussians have been living in Vilnius since long ago. In 1959, they accounted for 6.2% of the total city population. Until 1989, their number had been increasing and after this year it has been reducing. In 1959–1989, the number of Byelorussians increased by 15.6 thousand or by 2.1 times. In later years, it has reduced by 8.8 thousand. During the population census of 2001, Byelorussians amounted to 21.5 thousand accounting for 4.0% of Vilnius population (Table 2).

A similar dynamic pattern was followed in the case of Ukrainians yet their number and portion were smaller (Table 2). In 1959–2001, the number of Ukrainians increased from 6.6 thousand to 13.3 thousand, more than two-fold. After the restoration of independence, their number had reduced by 6.6 thousand or by 47.4%. During the population census of 2001, there were 7.0 thousand Ukrainians residing in Vilnius.

In the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the number of persons of Jewish nationality was reducing at highest rates. In 1959–2001, their number reduced from 16.4 to 2.8 thousand, by 5.9 times. Jews used to emigrate from Vilnius to other countries even in the Soviet years which was almost impossible for persons of other nationalities. Today, only a small part of the large community of Jews (in 1897 63.1 thousand) reside in Vilnius (Eberhardt, 1997).

The traditional national minorities of Vilnius, Tartars and Karaites, have never been very numerous. In 1959–1989, the number of Tartars increased from 496 to 1,311. In later years, it reduced to 952 accounting for 0.2% of Vilnius population (Table 2). The number of Karaites is even smaller. In the period under consideration, it underwent little variations and has always amounted to about 150.

At all times, Vilnius used to be the place of residence also for other nationalities. In recent years, the number of nationalities residing in Vilnius has reached 100. These national communities have always been small yet steadily growing. In 1959–1989, the number of people of these nationalities increased from 2.0 to 6.3 thousand, i.e., by 3.2 times. They were mainly representatives of different nations of the Soviet Union: Armenians, Latvians, Azerbaijani, Moldavians, Georgians, and Kazakhs. The groups of other smaller nationalities were even smaller. They accounted for only 1.1% of the total Vilnius population (Table 2).

After the restoration of independence, the total number of people of other nationalities has reduced by 2.2 thousand or by 35.0%. The dynamics of different nationalities has varied considerably. After the restoration of independence, a greater number of people have moved to Vilnius from the Western countries.

### PROPORTIONS OF NATIONALITIES RESIDING IN VILNIUS

Vilnius is one of the most multi-national Lithuanian cities. Among the larger cities of Lithuania, similar national composition is characteristic only of Klaipėda, which after World War II has been inhabited by people of various nationalities. Vilnius is distinguished not only for the large number of various nationalities but also for a rather high concentration of representatives of the total of these nationalities in the country. According to the portions of Vilnius residents of different nationalities in the total number of these nationalities over the country, they can be grouped in the following way:

1. Nationalities with representatives residing in Vilnius accounting for more than a half of the total population of this nationality in the country. In this respect, Jews occupy the leading position. More than two thirds of them reside in Vilnius: 69.1%. The rest live mainly in larger Lithuanian cities. The number of Byelorussians residing in Vilnius accounts for slightly more than a half of their total in Lithuania (50.1%). The rest live in larger Lithuanian cities and in south-eastern regions of the country. Vilnius also is the residence of 53.3% of the Lithuanian Karaites.
2. Nationalities with representatives residing in Vilnius accounting for one third to half of the total in Lithuania; Poles 43.2%, Georgians 42.8%, Russians 34.5%, Ukrainians 31.2%, as well as Armenians, Azerbaijani, Estonians, Greeks and many other smaller national communities. Larger communities of Russians and Ukrainians reside in Klaipėda, Kaunas and Visaginas and those of Poles in the south-eastern Šalčininkai, Vilnius, Trakai, and Švenčionėliai districts.
3. Nationalities with representatives residing in Vilnius accounting for 10 to 30% of the total in Lithuania: Tatars 29.4%, Gypsies 24.9%, Chuvash 25.8% as well as Latvians, Moldovians, Germans, Kazakhs, and other small national communities. In Vilnius reside 10.8% of Lithuanians, every tenth Lithuanian lives in Vilnius.

### NATIONAL COMPOSITION OF VILNIUS POPULATION ON THE LOWEST TERRITORIAL LEVEL (IN THE SMALLEST TERRITORIAL ADMINISTRATIVE UNITS “SENIŪNIJA”)

The territory of Vilnius city occupying an area of 402 sq. km is divided into 21 smallest territorial administrative units (Stanaitis, Česnavičius, 2006). During the population census of 2001, the structure of the population including its national composition was for the first time recorded on the lowest territorial administrative level. The local territorial profile shows an uneven distribution of national communities in Vilnius. It is expedient to analyze the relative portions of various nationalities in the smallest territorial administrative units of the city.

**Lithuanians.** The relative portions of Lithuanians in different smallest administrative units of Vilnius are very unevenly distributed. Lithuanians are dominant in the central administrative units of Vilnius city: Žvėrynas 71.7% and Antakalnis 70.8% (Fig. 1). Lithuanians account for 60–70% of the residents

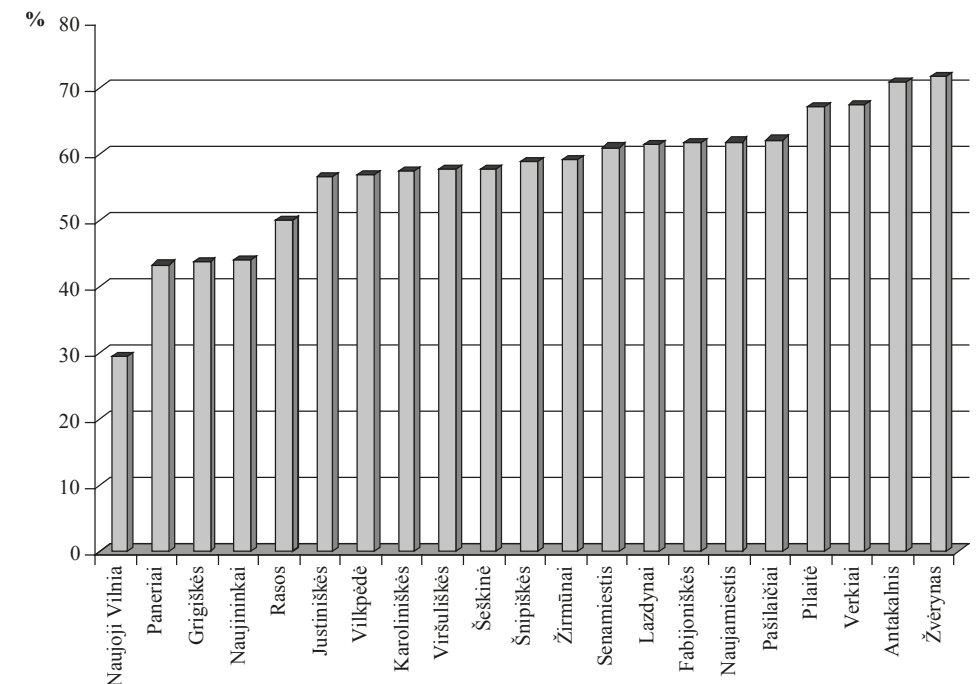


Fig. 1. The relative portions of Lithuanians in different smallest administrative units (seniūnija) in 2001

Source: data of the Department of Statistics to the Government of the Republic of Lithuania as the Central Statistical Office's; (<http://www.stat.gov.lt>). Statistikos departamentas, 2002

of Senamiestis, Naujamiestis, Lazdynai, Fabijoniškės, Pašilaičiai, Pilaitė, and Verkiai territorial administrative units. The smallest number of Lithuanians lives in the peripheral Naujoji Vilnia administrative unit (29.5%), where industry was intensively developed in the Soviet years. Namely in this administrative unit, the only one among other 21 units, the portion of Lithuanians is by 4.7% smaller than that of Poles. Lithuanians account for less than a half of the total population of Paneriai (43.3%), Grigiškės (43.8%), and Naujininkai (44.1%). They make half of the residents of Rasos administrative unit.

**Poles.** The territorial distribution of Poles is even more variable. In the peripheral Paneriai administrative unit, Poles account for more than one third (36.7%) of the total population (Fig. 2). The administrative units distinguished for the largest portions of Poles are: Naujoji Vilnia (34.2%), Rasos (27.9%), Naujininkai (25.7%), and Grigiškės (25.1%). The smallest communities of Poles reside in: Naujamiestis, Žvėrynas (12.1% in each), Antakalnis (12.7%), and Žirmūnai (14.4%) administrative units.

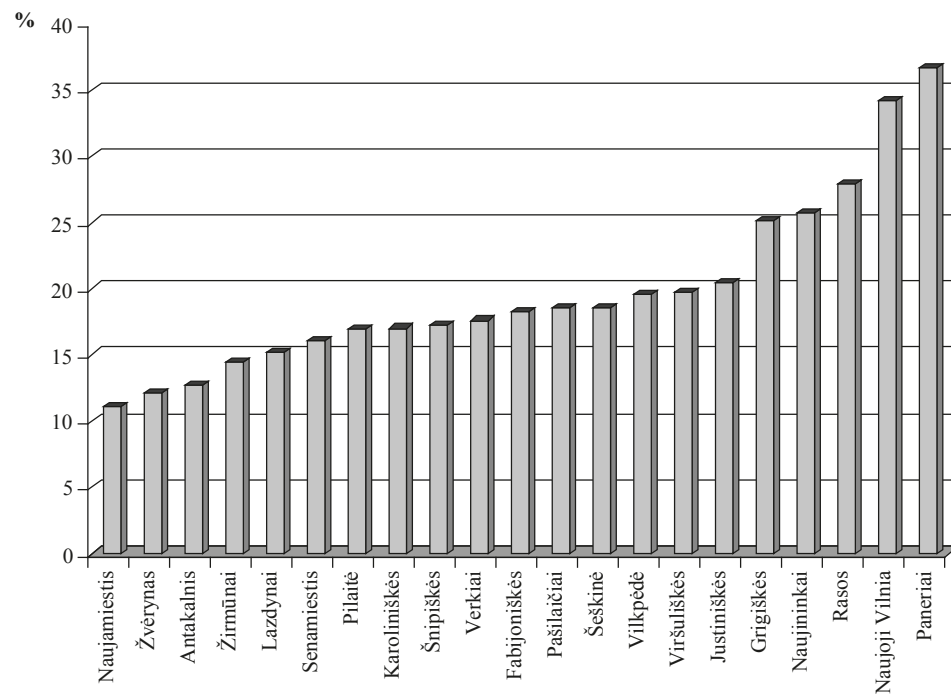


Fig. 2. The relative portions of Poles in different smallest administrative units (seniūnija) in 2001

Source: as in Fig. 1

**Russians.** Residents of Russian nationality are more evenly distributed in the smallest territorial administrative units of Vilnius city. Their largest community is concentrated in the Naujoji Vilnia administrative unit (19.8%) and the smallest one in the Verkiai administrative unit (8.3%) (Fig. 3). Larger concentrations of Russians have been recorded in: Naujininkai (17.9%), Žirmūnai (16.8%), Naujamiestis (16.9%), and Karoliniškės (16.5%) territorial administrative units, and smaller in: Pilaitė (8.6%), Antakalnis (9.8%), and Žvėrynas (9.9%) administrative units.

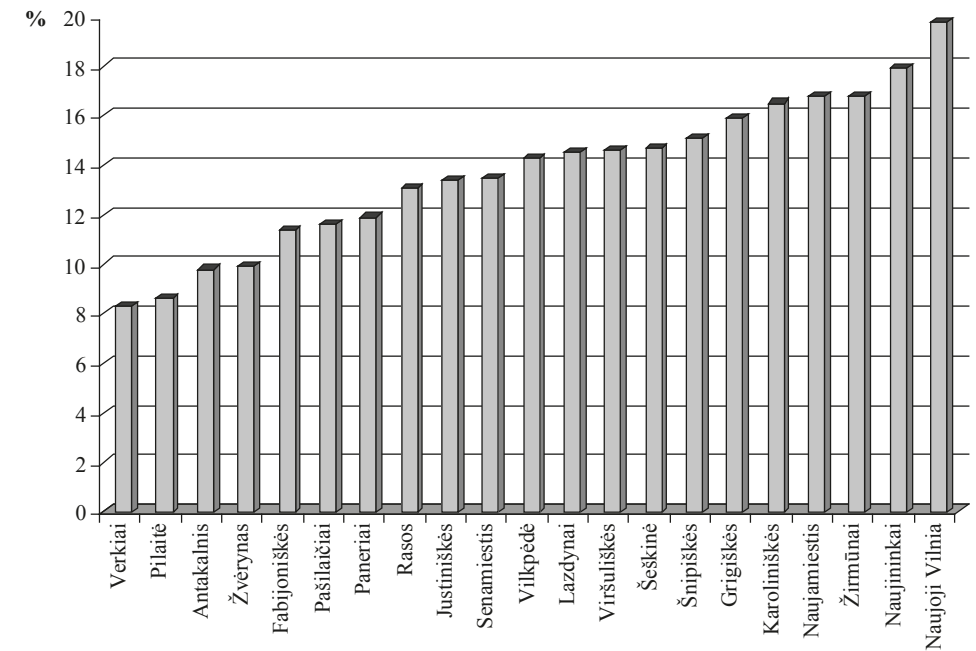


Fig. 3. The relative portions of Russians in different smallest administrative units (seniūnija) in 2001

Source: as in Fig. 1

**Other nationalities.** Other nationalities are mainly represented by Byelorussians and Ukrainians. The portions of other nationalities are small; sometimes they do not account even for 1%. In the Grigiškės administrative unit, the portion of Byelorussians is as large as 9.2%, in Naujoji Vilnia 9%, Naujininkai 5.6%, Vilkipėdė 4.3%, and Rasos 4.2%. The portions of Ukrainians are considerably smaller: Žirmūnai and Naujamiestis 1.7% in each, Karoliniškės 16%, and Naujininkai and Naujoji Vilnia 1.5% in each.

The most Lithuanian administrative units of Vilnius (with the highest portions of Lithuanians) are the old city quarters and the new blocks of flats in the western and northern parts of the city. This is predetermined by population of the city before the 20<sup>th</sup> century and the new development of the city in the last 20 years. Due to historical and city development factors, Poles have mainly concentrated in the peripheral eastern and southern parts of Vilnius, i.e., mainly in the industrial areas. Residents of other nationalities are distributed more evenly.

## CONCLUSIONS

In 1950–1989, the total number of population in Lithuanian cities and the number of population in Vilnius increased by 3.4 times each. Before the restoration of independence, the number of persons of different nationalities had rapidly increased though at varying rates. Among the larger national groups, only the number of persons of Jewish nationality had decreased. In the mentioned period, the number of Lithuanians increased most. Lithuanians were followed by Tatars, Poles, Byelorussians, Ukrainian, Russians and other nationalities.

As the number of persons of all nationalities increased, their portion in the total population changed following different patterns. The portion of Russians, Ukrainians, Byelorussians and Poles decreased whereas the portions of Lithuanians and small groups of other nationalities decreased. In 2001, for the first time after the war Poles represent in Vilnius the second largest national group after Lithuanians or 18.7% of the total Vilnius Population.

During the whole period under consideration, Lithuanians, Poles and Russians accounted for the largest portions of Vilnius population. In 2001, they accounted for 90.5% of the total Vilnius population. After restoration of independence (since 1990), the total number of Vilnius population and the number of persons of different nationalities decreased. The number of Jews, Ukrainians, Russians and Byelorussians decreased considerably. The number of Poles decreased only slightly. The number of Lithuanians, Germans, the Romany, etc., increased.

During the whole period of 50 years, the number and portion of Lithuanians in Vilnius was increasing. Gradually Vilnius is turning into a Lithuanian city. The portion of Lithuanians is approaching 60%. Yet Vilnius continues to be the most multinational city of Lithuania. At present, it is a place of residence for large portions of national minorities of the country: more than two thirds of Jews, more than a half of Byelorussians and Karaites, more than one third of Poles, Russians, Ukrainians and persons of other nationalities.

## REFERENCES

- Adlys, P. and Ambrazaitienė, D.** 2002: Lietuvos tautinė sudėtis vienalytiškiausia. In *Mokslas ir gyvenimas*, No. 10, pp. 22–23.
- Centralnoje Statističeskoje upravljenije pri Sovete Ministrov Litovskij SSR, 1973: Itogi perepisi naselenije 1970 goda po Litovskoj SSR, No. 2, Vilnius: Centraljnoje statističeskoje upravljenije Litovskoj SSR.
- Centralnoje Statističeskoje upravljenije Litovskoj SSR, 1980: Itogi Vsesojuznoj perepisi naselenija 1979 goda po Litovskoj SSR, No. 1, 2, Vilnius: Centraljnoje statističeskoje upravljenije Litovskoj SSR.
- Centrinė Statistikos Valdyba prie TSRS Ministrų Tarybos, 1963: 1959 metų Visasąjunginio gyventojų surašymo duomenys. Lietuvos *TSR*, Vilnius: LTSR valstybinis statistikos komitetas.
- Eberhardt, P.** 1997: Przemiany narodowościowe na Litwie, Warszawa: Przegląd Wschodni.
- Lietuvos Valstybinis Statistikos komitetas, 1990: Pagrindiniai 1989 metų gyventojų surašymo duomenys, Vilnius: LTSR valstybinis statistikos komitetas.
- Stanaitis, A.** 1971: Natūralus ir mechaninis Vilniaus miesto gyventojų prieaugis pastaraisiais dešimtmečiais. In *Lietuvos TSR MA Mokslo darbai. Geografija ir geologija*, No. 8, pp. 42–49.
- Stanaitis, A. and Stankūnienė, E.** 1981: Vilniaus gyventojų dinamika XX a. antroje pusėje. In *Lietuvos TSR MA Mokslo darbai. Geografija*, No. 17, pp. 109–123.
- Stanaitis, S. and Česnavičius, D.** 2006: Development and economic assessment of operating enterprises in Vilnius city in 1995–2005. In *Geografija. Mokslo darbai*, No. 42, 1, pp.13–22.
- Statistikos departamentas prie Lietuvos Respublikos Vyriausybės, 1991: Gyventojų surašymai Lie tuvoje, No. 1, 2. Vilnius: Statistikos departamentas.
- Statistikos departamentas, 2000: Gyventojų surašymai Lietuvoje, Vilnius: Statistikos departamentas.
- Statistikos departamentas, 2002: Gyventojai pagal lytį, amžių, tautybę ir tikybą, Vilnius: Statistikos centras.

**CORRESPONDENCE TO:**

Saulius Stanaitis  
Department of Region Geography  
Vilnius Pedagogical University  
Studentu 39, Vilnius, Lithuania  
[e-mail: saulius.stanaitis@vpu.lt]

Darius Česnavičius  
The Department of Region Geography  
Vilnius Pedagogical University  
Studentu 39, Vilnius, Lithuania  
[e-mail: darius.ces@vpu.lt]