

Teaching of Classical Languages in Lithuania

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Dear colleagues, first of all I would like to express my gratitude to Professor Diego Poli and to Professor Carlo Santini for inviting me to Perugia and especially for directing my attention towards the topic of my report. It is not my first survey in the field of teaching Latin and Greek in Lithuania to deliver to the European colleagues; the very first attempt to introduce our situation has been made in April 2003, at the International conference for the support of classical studies, organized under the Greek presidency of European Union by the Hellenic ministry of National Education. Lithuania was only a candidate-country by then. So we looked forward to the results of the meeting and cherished hopes that the final document, called Memorandum, which was approved by the authoritative representatives of all EU members and would-be members (Belgium, Czech Republic, Cyprus, Denmark, Estonia, France, Germany, Greece, Hungaria, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Slovakia, Slovenia, United Kingdom) and was addressed to the executive officials, will have a positive influence on our national strategy of education and will improve the factual situation, which was regarded by the Lithuanian Classicists as critical by then. On the other hand, the need to call such a meeting and the reports given by its participants made it obvious that the situation in other countries was also to be worried about.

The international congress mentioned above has been organized to support Mr.'s George Papandreou, then Greek Minister of Education, initiative to establish the European Center of Classical studies in Europe and to revive interest for our common European idea of humanism, or *paideia*, the primary and fundamental idea which aims to develop the human personality in its totality and thus is closely connected with the main goals of European Union. Some concrete proposals were made regarding the role of such center within the EU; it was stressed that the major task of this center should be to further the teaching of Classical studies at secondary level and to foster the teaching and research at University level and in other academic and cultural institutions.

So we here in Lithuania (I mean the Department of Classics at Vilnius University first of all) took the pains to arrange the meeting with the executive officials in the Ministry of Education and to discuss and stimulate the issues of the conference; we also appealed (not for the first time) our Minister of Education with our proposal how to respond the ideas of Memorandum, but we had our labor for us. Before coming to Perugia I got in touch with the officer-in-chief in order to clear-up the present situation of Latin at schools, but I got no answer; I guess the situation has passed out of control. A new, pseudo-utilitarian mentality spread rapidly, not only among the students, but mainly among politicians and officers, the learning of classical languages is looked upon as useless, therefore we can trace a remarkable decline of Classical studies in our country.

Thus, I would like to look over our situation: what Classical education meant to Lithuania in the historical retrospect, what it was like at the beginning of our independence, regained in 1990 after the 50 years of Soviet occupation, and what it is like now, after the 15 years of our recovered self-dependence.

The history of Classical languages in Lithuania can be traced back to the beginnings of the state itself, the XIII century, when Latin, as well as Greek, languages were adopted by the Grand Dukes of Lithuania as the languages used in diplomatic relations. Thus Lithuania strides into the light of history. Already in the XVI century the Grand Duke of Lithuania and the King of Poland Sigismundus Augustus, one of the co-authors of the Second Statute of Lithuania (1566) and the author of the book *Decisiones ... de rebus in sacro Auditorio Lituanico ex appellatione iudicatis*..(On decisions made in hearing cases of appeal in the sacred court of Lithuania) had a library, which consisted of about 4 000 volumes, written in Latin and in other European languages; the library by his will was left to the *Societas Jesu* (Jesuit Order), which came to Lithuania at that time (1566) and has become the main agent of introducing *Latinitas* to the broader auditorium. The schools, where Latin was taught, are known from the beginning of the XVI century. In Lithuania at that time Latin had a special status, at some points different from that in other European countries (Poland, Germany, France, Italy, Hungary, Netherlands etc.), where *Latinitas* was regarded only as an equivalent of *humanitas*. In Lithuania *Latinitas* had not only cultural, but also political and ideological relevance, symbolizing the idea of national sovereignty and being the source of national pride. This status of Latin is related to a legend created at that time and narrated in the Lithuanian chronicles of the XVI century, about the descent of Lithuanian nation from Romans and the origin of the Lithuanian language as one naturally developed out of Latin. Though this sort of ideological trick was used not for the first time in the European history

and is known from the pre-historic times (just to remember the Heraclidae legend), it worked out as usual and facilitated the integration of Lithuania into the European political and educational realm. The legend was very popular and constantly revived under similar circumstances during the course of about three centuries.

The tradition of the Classical languages in Lithuania has been strengthened in 1570, when in Vilnius, the capital of Lithuania, the first college by the *Societas Jesu* was founded. Most of the subjects delivered at the college, according to the European tradition, were humanitarian and were presented in the Western European style. The studies lasted for six years. The main educational purpose of this school was to train students Latin, but Greek grammar was taught and the Greek authors were read at the same time as well. In 1579 King Stephanus Batorus granted college the university status and from that time it was known as *Alma Academia et Universitas Vilnensis Societatis Jesu*; that is the beginning of the Vilnius university of nowadays and it is unseparable not only from the history of Lithuania but also from the history of Classics in Lithuania.

At the start of its existence the University of Vilnius had only two faculties: those of Philosophy and Theology. In 1641 the Faculty of Law was founded. The main language studied and the language of teaching up to the year 1773 was Latin, but the proper attention was also paid to the studies of Greek. The authors, studied at the University, corresponded the common European curriculum (Vergil, Ovid, Cicero, Horace, Tacitus, Seneca, Caesar, Titus Livius, Sallust, Marcial, Aristotle, Plato, Homer, Hesiod, Demosthenes, Herodotus, Xenophon, Lukian, Dio Chrysostom and others). The publishing house of the University published Latin and Greek texts, translations, commentaries, dictionaries, textbooks (e. g., Cicero's *De officiis* in 1583, 1585, 1593, 1606, *De senectute* in 1595, 1606, *De amicitia* in 1603, 1609, *Oratio Pro Milone* (XVIII cent.), *Oratio Pro Murena et Pro domo sua* (middle of the XVIII-th cent), *Epistolae ad familiares* (middle of the XVIII-th cent.), *History* by Josephus Flavius in 1595, *Aethiopica* by Heliodor in 1588, 1606, Catullus' *Carmina* in 1773, Horace, *Carmina* in 1772, translation of "*Coniuratio Catilinae*" et "*Bellum Iugurthinum*" in 1767, *Commentarius in selectas M. T. Ciceronis orationes. Ad usum scholarum S. I. P. 1 – 3*, 1754 – 1756 etc).

Already in 1655 Professor of the Vilnius University Sigismundus Lauxmin wrote the first original Greek grammar – *Epitome institutionum linguae Graecae*; the manual of rhetorics written by him – *Praxis oratoria sive praecepta artis rhetoricae* (first published in 1648) – was very popular all over the Europe and was reprinted in Germany, Austria and other countries (14 editions are known). This was the environment that brought up the great

amount of Lithuanian Neo-Latin literature and 17-th century poet Sarbievius (1595-1640), called “Horace of Sarmatia” or “Christian Horace”; he imitated the works of Horace, however, he attempted to merge them with a Christian mentality. His Latin poems (*Lyricorum libri quinque*) were famous all over the Europe (60 editions in XVII-XVIII cent.). The very first edition had already marked Sarbievius for immense popularity and fame, and the Pope Urbanus VIII in 1625 crowned the poet with laurels, likening him to Dante and Petrarch; Sarbievius was also the Professor of Rhetorics, Philosophy and Theology at Vilnius University.

After the suppression of the Jesuit Order (1773) and the annexation of Lithuania by Russia (1795) the University was reorganised and renamed The Imperial University of Vilnius (1803). Then the Department of literature and rhetorics was founded, where Classical Philology was taught. The classes of Professor G. E. Grodek (1762–1825), graduated from the Göttingen University, were especially popular at that time. The Professor is considered to be the originator of the Classical Philology in Lithuania in the full sense of the word. He lectured on Hermeneutics, Textology, Metrics, History of Greek and Roman art and Literature, Geography, Numismatics, Epigraphics and some other subjects. He was also the author of the first original manual on the history of the Classical Greek literature called *Initia historiae Graecorum litteraria*, vol. I-II, printed in Vilnius in 1821–1823.

In 1832, as a result of students participation in the uprising, Vilnius University was closed by the decree of Russian Tsar (Nicolas I). During the period 1919 – 1939, when this part of Lithuania belonged to Poland, it functioned as a Polish University named after King Stephanus Batorus. The Classical Philology has been represented by two departments, those of Latin and Greek Philology, which upheld the best traditions of the Classical Philology. Then another center of the Classical Philology for the remaining part of the Lithuania was established (1922), to substitute the lost Vilnius University – namely, Kaunas University.

After the Soviet occupation Vilnius University was reorganised to follow the pattern of Soviet universities and Kaunas University was closed. Though the significance of Latin and Greek as the classical foundations for the humanitarian education was lost, the teaching of classical languages in this situation was a very significant factor that helped to keep the elements of classical or European education in Lithuania. The Greek language and other subjects (Historical Grammar of Latin and Greek, History of Ancient Greek and Roman Culture, Greek and Roman authors) during that period were taught only at Vilnius University, where in 1940 the Department of Classical Philology was founded, but at the same time the program of Classical philology was abolished. Latin Grammar was the obligatory subject in

humanitarian, medical, biological etc. training; in 1940-1990 the totum of hours ranged from 100 to 190 (to tell the truth, today the total is drastically diminished, to ~40-60 hours in medical or law training, and is abolished in biological training). The main professorial corpus was concentrated at the Department of Classics of VU; part of its staff had gained their professional competence before the II World War at various European universities, part – after the War, at the S.-Petersburg and Moscow universities in Russia and very rarely at various universities in Poland. From the 1945 for some short time (1945-1953; 1958-1965) the program of Classical philology was revived, but from 1969 to 1990 there was no “pure” Classicist study-program. Classical philology became a part of the alternative study-program, combined with Lithuanian philology, of which the Lithuanian philology took the greatest part. Only the regained independence brought the Classical philology to life again (1990). This fact has been looked upon as a very significant mark of the maturity of the state cultural and educational policy. The number of our students was steadily increasing (from ~5 to ~13 each year), so did the professorial corpus; the younger colleagues of mine, graduated from our department, did their PhD at various European universities (Cambridge, Sorbonne, Fryeburg, Cracowia, Lund etc.).

Now Vilnius University is the only school in Lithuania to offer Classics and a unique provider of the research in the relevant fields. It is quite a place to note, that though Lithuania is a small country (~3 mln. inhabitants), it is a country with a lot of universities – some 16 in number. And it is first of all not a great achievement, but a big problem, bound to the financing of the universities, which is not sufficient, and the quality of studies. From the beginning of the new century our situation was steadily becoming worse, because of the requirements for the number of students pro rata per department, on the one hand, and the limitation of the number of the would-be students, imposed by the government, on the other hand. Now we have ~50 students in our department and are allowed to have no more than 10 new students the next year; besides, we have no possibility to run a MA program for the last 2 years, because the groups are too small. Under such circumstances we were compelled to rearrange the MA program and to join Greek and Latin studies together. Now we have to wait for a year to see if this step is a success. The demand for Classical languages continuously declines, and this downward trend has not stopped yet. Because of the poor situation at the secondary and high-education level our program is accessible to those students who as a rule have not had any Greek classes in secondary or high school and very few of them have had any Latin classes, so they start learning both Latin and Greek from the very beginning; the combination of Greek and Latin is compulsory. The program of Classical Studies is

composed following the traditional continental curriculum and the British–American pattern leading to Bachelor’s degree in Philology after four years of study and Master’s degree after two more years. The program deals with the foundation of European culture as it appears in Classical texts; literary texts are read on historical basis. Students of BA during the 1-st year study Latin and Greek Grammar and Authors, History of Ancient Greece, History of Classical Scholarship, History of Rome, History of Latin Writings in Lithuania. During the 2-nd year – Latin and Greek Authors, Modern Greek, History of Greek and Roman Literature; during the 3-rd year – Latin and Greek Authors, Modern Greek, Cultural History of Greece and Rome; during the 4-th year – Latin and Greek Authors, Modern Greek, Classical Philosophy, Historical Grammar of Greek and Latin. Students read Caesar, Salust, Cicero, Vergil, Livius, Horace, Tibul, Propertius, Ovid, Latin writings of Lithuania, Homer, Xenophon, Aristotle, Euripides, Plato, Aristophanes, Plutarchus, the Greek poets, books of *Novum Testamentum*, and others. Also the department offers the postgraduate doctoral programmes, to specialize in Neo-Latin studies, Linguistics, Greek philosophical tradition, Greek and Roman literature, Christian scripts etc. Our Department offers a wide range of optional courses (Greek mythology, Greek religion, Greek civilization, Greek political thought, Classical Greek, Modern Greek, history of Greece etc.).

Recently on the basis of our Department the new, alternative study-program – Modern Greek and Lithuanian Philology – has been started, partly aimed to revive the interest also in ancient Greek culture. This program is partly financed and supported by the A. Onassis Benefit foundation and by the Greek government.

The same critical situation can be traced and in secondary education system. After the II World War, from 1949, Latin, an obligatory before then, was excluded from the school’s curricula because of the influence of the Soviet educational system. Thus, for the young generation, the possibility to understand and share the common European culture was lost, though the so-called humanitarian schools did exist. But due to the efforts of our Department in 1967 Latin was re-introduced as an obligatory subject to the humanitarian secondary schools again; there were 10 such schools in Lithuania at that time. The activity of our Department was directed towards different aims:

1. to preserve the teaching of Classical languages at the university level, to popularize Classics in the various strata of society;
2. to edit dictionaries, translations, textbooks and manuals, which by then were available only in Russian;
3. to work out the teaching-program and the system of teaching control; to train teachers.

The humanitarian schools usually used to run a 3-year program (the totum of ~200 hours). In 2002 we had ~60 schools, where Latin was studied by ~2000 students and taught by ~42 teachers, mostly graduated from our department; there was no Greek program at schools (as it is now; if my data are correct, Ancient Greek is at the very elementary level taught only in 2 schools, and only as an optional subject).

From the 1984 a secondary school competition has started, which every two years was organized by the Department of Classics together with the Ministry of education. The final phase brought together the best young Latinists from all over the country and usually took place at our university. This tradition totally stopped in 2001 because of the changes in the school educational system, when Latin had been excluded from the schools curriculum and had been made an optional subject only, and the 3-rd in range, even for the so called humanitarian schools; the extent of the program has been minimized. There is no central regulation, no external evaluation system left. Until 2000 the Department had continuously been the supplier of both methodology and actual teaching at the qualification improvement courses for the teachers of Latin. Now this tradition has stopped also. So the instruction of Latin now is the responsibility of a teacher non-specialist (often a person with a humanitarian background, who has studied Latin for one year); thus there are no real guarantees of the quality of instruction, not to speak about the enthusiasm of both the teachers and the students. Ministry of education does nothing to change the situation.

Nevertheless, the Classicists in Lithuania do their job: the professors and students, graduated from our department, have translated into Lithuanian and published a lot of texts (Homer, Hesiod, Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides, Aristotle, Plato, *Pseudo-Longinus*, Herakleitus, Sappho, Theocritus, Herodotus, Xenophon, Plutarch, Lukian, Epictetus, Marcus Aurelius, Aurelius Augustinus, Seneca, Caesar, Plautus, Terence, Vergil, Ovid, Lucretius, Catullus, Cicero, Tacitus, Titus Livius, Suetonius, Petronius, Apuleius, Markus Aurelius, Epiktetes, Suetonius, Cornelius Nepos, lots of Neo-Latin scripts and others), write textbooks, monographs, popularize the Classical culture in various mass-media. The main textbooks of the Classical languages, used in high and secondary schools of Lithuania, were written by the former or present Professors or graduates of Vilnius University. The first textbook of Greek language in Lithuanian was written by Prof. M. Raczkauskas (1886 – 1968) and published in 1930 - 1934. Now the students study Greek from the textbook by Prof. J. Dumczius (1905–1986), who graduated from the Basels University; he also prepared a manual on the Greek historical grammar (published in 1975). Prof. J.Dumczius together with Prof. L. Valkunas and others are the authors of several Latin textbooks for the students of Law, Medicine,

Biology, Philology and History; they study from the textbooks of Latin prepared exceptionally for their use. The textbook for the humanitarian schools *Vox Latina* by L. Valkunas and K. Kuzavinis (first published in 1973) was the first and the only Latin textbook for schools in the former Soviet Union; it is still in use till now.

A year ago we have been invited by Prof. Di Donato (Pisa University) to take part as the 3-rd participating institution (together with Cracowia University) in the project “Educating Greek and Latin Antiquity: culture, history, society”. Its target groups were meant to be the teachers from primary to high schools, its aims – ensuring in every schools’ level an appropriate knowledge of Greek and Latin cultures, promoting the development of a more attractive approach through the use of new technologies. We were really upset to know that the project had not received a financial support.

Thus, Classical Studies were part of the University curriculum from the very beginning till nowadays and played a very important role in the development of Lithuanian national culture and political history. Today they remain the bridge linking Lithuanian culture not only to its roots, but to the Western civilization. We hope that this tradition will be continued, maybe with the help of our European colleagues.