



Date : 07/08/2006

**Advocacy for Libraries - The role of Library Associations:  
Experience of Lithuania**

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<b>Meeting:</b>	<b>83. Management of Library Associations</b>
<b>Simultaneous Interpretation:</b>	<b>Yes</b>
WORLD LIBRARY AND INFORMATION CONGRESS: 72ND IFLA GENERAL CONFERENCE AND COUNCIL 20-24 August 2006, Seoul, Korea <a href="http://www.ifla.org/IV/ifla72/index.htm">http://www.ifla.org/IV/ifla72/index.htm</a>	

**Summary:**

*The Lithuanian Librarians' Association (LLA) supports libraries and contributes to the achievement of goals set by the democratic society through legislation and advocacy.*

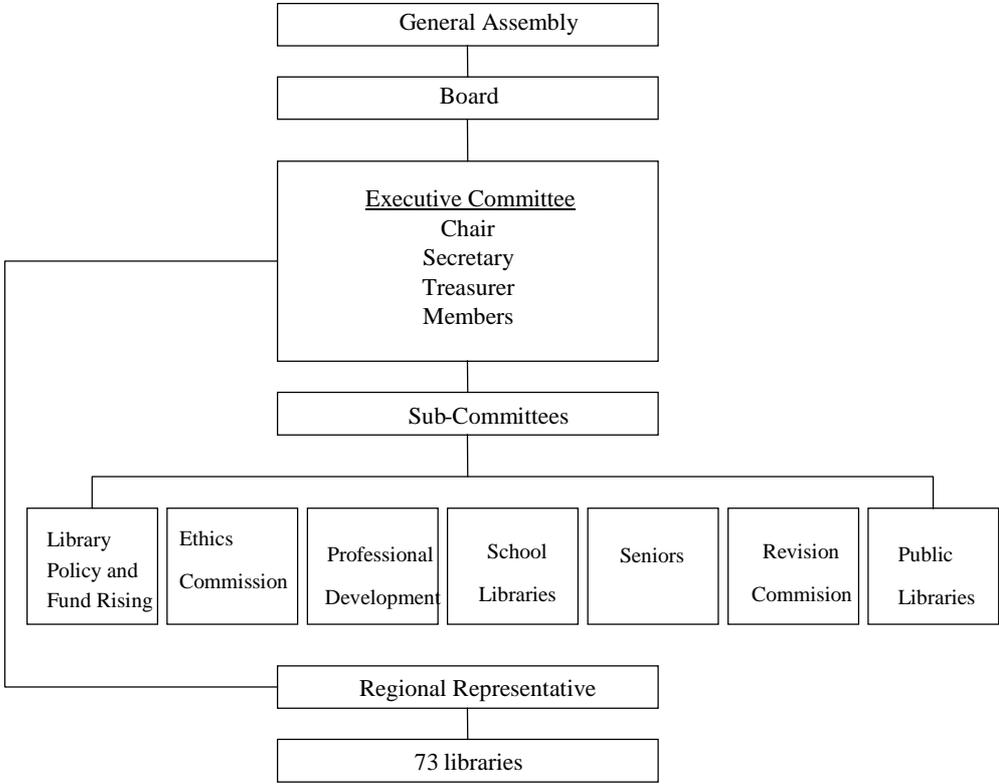
*This paper outlines the activities of LLA and the main results of its efforts.*

**1. Organisational - Functional Structure of LLA**

The Lithuanian Librarians' Association was established in 1931 and operated until 1941 as a voluntary and independent organisation bringing together the citizens of the Republic of Lithuania. The activities of the organisation were impeded during the occupation period since it was prohibited. However, it was re-established in 1991. The goals of re-established Association were the following:

- to develop librarianship as a separate science;
- to strengthen the role of libraries in the society;
- to develop research work;
- to promote professional development and raise the level of professional expertise of library staff;
- to make suggestions to the Government of the Republic of Lithuania and local authorities regarding the improvement of library work; and
- to develop international relations with analogous organisations in foreign countries.

The Lithuanian Librarians' Association is the organisation of natural persons that has 68 divisions all over Lithuania and combines over 2 300 employees of various libraries – national, state, academic, public and special. It makes 38% of all Lithuanian librarians. The Association has been involved in close co-operation with the associations of research and public libraries (both from counties and municipalities).



1 chart

The supreme authority of the Association is the General Assembly that is organised once in every three years. The assembly elects a chairman and a board comprised of 15 representatives in total. It also approves a statute and operational programme for three-year period; the revision commission is also elected. The Association conference is convened each year.

The elected board that also closely co-operates with various divisions and co-ordinates their activity operates between congresses. The board is comprised of working groups responsible for the work of research, public and school libraries, professional development and international relations. A representative responsible for relations with seniors, i.e. long-term library employees that are no longer employed in libraries, is also incorporated into the board.

80 % of Lithuanian Librarians' Association members are public libraries staff. They also have a decisive opinion in this organisation because these libraries still encounter with the most painstaking problems in the country.

## 2. LLA initiatives

One of the most important initiatives of the Lithuanian Librarians' Association was the Programme on Lithuanian Public Libraries Modernisation for 2003 – 2013 approved by the Government of the Republic of Lithuania aiming at:

- elimination of structural differences of information access between town and periphery and offering of equal possibilities for all residents of Lithuania to use information in order to meet their social and public requirements;
- allowing public libraries to collect, store and disseminate cultural heritage and make it as accessible as possible.

The programme has been appointed the amount of LTL 313 Mio and is currently under revision; moreover, the financial expression of library construction and reconstruction, possibilities of collection acquisition, technology modernisation rates, etc. should be revised this year as well. 80% of expenses for construction and reconstruction of municipality public libraries will be financed by this programme; whereas municipalities themselves will fund the rest 20%.

Considering the fact how insufficient financing public and especially municipality libraries receive for acquisition, i.e. renewal of collections, in Autumn 2004 the Lithuanian Librarians' Association organised the Act of Candles: in the evening all Lithuanian libraries (almost four thousand in total) switched the lights off for five minutes and lighted up the candles in order to symbolise the darkness that was going to swallow the country; thus, it would get behindhand, if the authorities neglected libraries. The act attracted attention from the press, radio, TV and other media and contributed to better financing of libraries later.

Another aim of this modernisation programme lies in guaranteeing access to the Internet and electronic catalogue LIBIS in all public libraries. In early 2006 the Government of the Republic of Lithuania enacted a resolution regarding the revision of this programme; as a results, the construction of libraries and renovation of collections in the Lithuanian public libraries should be accelerated.

One of the essential current objectives of the Lithuanian Librarians' Association is the constant dialogue with the Government and the Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania in order to solve the most painstaking problem of libraries, i.e. wages and salaries of library staff. This year the wages of library staff were successfully increased by 20%. It was a really heavy discussion with the Government and the Seimas that involved even the members of the EU Parliament.

The preparation of a programming document providing all necessary information about the ways of employment of the EU Structural Funds support and its co-ordination with the European Commission were one of the essential conditions for Lithuania to receive support from the EU Structural Funds after becoming a EU member. At present the Single Programming Document for 2007-2013 has been already prepared. As far as this paper is concerned it is worth mentioning that the representatives of LLA also participated in the main working groups responsible for making suggestions to the preparation of this strategic document. Due to their efforts the funds appointed for culture and education were successfully increased.

The new programming period will be launched at 2008 and it will be possible to subject any project related to:

- development of computer infrastructure within cultural institutions;
- creation of e-content and e-services;
- improvement of computer abilities; and
- creation of continuously learning regions on the basis of existing centres.

Another focus of the Lithuanian Librarians' Association is the National Library Week that has been already organised for six times. It always takes place on 23<sup>rd</sup> to 30<sup>th</sup> of April. This year the event was dedicated to the promotion of reading and invited to "Read. Cognise. Enjoy". A special poster was published on the occasion of the event and distributed to all libraries.

The sponsor of this library week as well as previously was the Ministry of Culture and the National Radio and Television of Lithuania. Advertising videos were broadcast on the national radio and TV. A 30 second video was shown on the main national TV channel for forty times and Programme 1 of the National Radio played the advertising tune for 174 times. Due to the following actions the attendance and visibility of libraries increase as well as library staff itself becomes better visible.

The Lithuanian Librarians' Association also organises the annual competition for the title of the Best Librarian and the Ministry of Culture has established three awards, namely the main award and two incentive prizes. The prizes are established by other library sponsors as well.

This year the Lithuanian Librarians' Association supported by the Ministry of Culture introduced a public library portal <http://www.bibliotekos.lt> (<http://www.library.lt>). The portal currently provides information on all Lithuanian public libraries, which is supplemented and updated by seven public libraries (having administration rights). The portal has already become one more form of libraries' visibility and one of the ways of professional development of librarians and international co-operation.

International co-operation has been one of the most important activity spheres of the Association since its establishment in 1931 when the first contacts with the neighbouring Latvia and Estonia have been established. Thus, probably the closest relations with the neighbours, i.e. Latvia, Estonia and Byelorussia still remain. The co-operation contracts have been also concluded with Russia, United Kingdom and other countries. Likewise the Association has been participating in the activities of various international organisations.