

Short history of the Ministry of Justice of the Republic of Lithuania



The Ministry of Justice was founded in 1918 after the first Government of independent Lithuania was set up and lawyer Petras Leonas was appointed Minister of Justice on 11 November. At that time, the Ministry of Justice was responsible for administering the work of courts. The first Minister of Justice of independent Lithuania had to play a major role – to lay the foundations for the operation of justice system in Lithuania.

Under the leadership of Liudas Noreika, Minister of Justice of the third Government, the Lithuanian legal framework continued to be developed and the Ministry itself was in charge of organising the entire justice system in the country. The Ministry managed the court system, prosecution authorities, notary offices and places of imprisonment. Its scarce central apparatus structurally comprised three departments: the Department of General Affairs, the Department of Rights and the Department of Prisons. In 1919, the Ministry began developing a temporary court system and organising its work: it introduced three tiers of courts (justices of the peace, district courts and, according to the historical tradition, the Supreme Tribunal), military courts and appointed judges.

The Declaration of the sixth Government presented on 23 June 1920 identified two key objectives of the then Ministry of Justice: “to work out the court which would meet the needs of the entire population, be quick, equitable and accessible to everyone” and “to produce the necessary and relevant draft legislation such as the civil and criminal statutes, civil and criminal procedures, etc.” The drafting and promulgation of the “foster care” and “inheritance” laws, review of the temporary law “on the facilities for arrestees” and rearranging prisons were also mentioned as some of the key tasks of the Ministry in the Declaration.

The creation of the court system, which had been the focal point of the Ministry of Justice, was completed in 1922. At that time, the Republic of Lithuania already had justices of the peace, military courts and district courts, the Tribunal and arbitrages.

Under the leadership of Antanas Tumėnas, Minister of Justice of the ninth, tenth and eleventh Governments, major progress was made in drafting the Civil Code and the Criminal Code, harmonising the laws in effect and education of law professionals.

In 1924, the structure of the Ministry of Justice was simplified and all its functions were delegated to the Secretariat composed of the Inspector of Prisons and the Council of the Minister of Justice comprising three permanent members delegated by the Present and six senior officials of the justice system, namely, the Secretary General of the Ministry of Justice, representatives of judicial authorities, prosecution authorities and the bar. The Council was in charge of codification, analysis of draft laws proposed by the Minister of Justice, preparation of legal opinions. At that time, prisons and lock-up facilities were subordinate to the Ministry of Justice.

During the interwar period, the seat of the Ministry of Justice was located in the Chamber of Justice (a building on the corner of Sapiegos and Ožėškienės streets) built according to the design of a famous architect Edmundas Frykas in 1928. Later, in the autumn of 1936, the building was adapted for the chambers of the then Seimas.

On 3 August 1940, when Lithuania officially became a member of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), the USSR Stalin Constitution of 1936 came into force and all public authorities were renamed after their counterparts in the USSR. Accordingly, the Ministry of Justice of the Republic of Lithuania was renamed the People’s Commissariat for Justice of the Lithuanian Soviet Socialist Republic (LSSR). Povilas Pakarklis was appointed People’s Commissioner

for Justice of the LSSR in the Government set up on 17 June 1940. By order of the Communist Party, the then Ministry of Justice had to implement "the proletarian justice system" solely aimed at strengthening the Communist Party and the USSR.

Around 1953, the old name of the Ministry was restored: the Commissariat became the Ministry of Justice of the LSSR and Albinas Likas served as Minister of Justice. However, the Ministry was liquidated on 5 August 1959 and was replaced by the Judicial Commission under the Council of Ministers of the LSSR by Resolution No 590 of 30 November 1959 of the Council of Ministers of the LSSR.

By a decree passed on 30 September 1970 by the Presidium of the Supreme Council of the LSSR, the national Ministry of Justice of the LSSR was set up and began operating on 1 January 1971. Its seat was in the building of the current Supreme Court of Lithuania (at Gynėjų Street 6, Vilnius, formerly Lentvario Street). There, the Ministry operated for about 20 years until it was relocated to Latvių Street 53/54 (currently accommodating the Embassy of the Russian Federation in Lithuania). Alfonsas Randakevičius served as Minister of Justice of the LSSR and was subsequently succeeded by Pranas Kūris in 1977.

The Ministry of Justice moved into its current building (at Gedimino Avenue 30/Stulginskio Street 1), built before 1940, in 1993. In that year, the building was handed over by the Ministry of International Economic Relations which was dissolved delegating its functions to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Previously, around 1980–1991, the building housed the Ministry of Trade and the Prosecutor's Office of the October District of Vilnius before that.

After the occupation of almost fifty years, the statehood of Lithuania was restored on 11 March 1990 and the first Government of the independent Lithuania was formed on 23 March of the same year. Lawyer Pranas Kūris, who served as Minister of Justice of the LSSR in 1977–1990, was appointed to the post of the first Minister of Justice of the Republic of Lithuania. Since March 1991, the average tenure of the Minister of Justice has been two years. Remigijus Šimašius, the incumbent tenth Minister of Justice of the independent Lithuania, was appointed Minister of Justice on 10 December 2008.

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