

President of the Court of Justice, doctor *honoris causa* of Mykolas Römeris University, dear Koen,
President of the General Court, dear Marc,
Rector of Mykolas Römeris University, dear Inga,

Ambassador of Lithuania to the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg, dear Dainius,
Members of the Court,
Members of the Lithuanian community,
Dear colleagues, dear friends,

Following the Lithuanian national anthem, performed by Ilan Schneider — a Vilnius born representative of the Lithuanian cultural diaspora here in our host country of Luxembourg and the first solo viola player of the Luxembourg Philharmonic — allow me, now, on behalf of the Lithuanian Members of the Court, Irmantas, Saulius, Danutė, and myself, to extend a warm welcome to this commemoration of a turning point in our nation's history: the restoration of Lithuania's independence on the 11th of March 1990.

We gather today to remember not merely a legal act or a date on the calendar, but the courage, hope, and resilience of a people who reclaimed their right to determine their own destiny.

Thirty-six years ago, Lithuanians stood united against forces that sought to erase our sovereignty. Ordinary citizens — students, artists, workers, teachers, farmers — joined hands and voices to demand freedom, dignity, and the restoration of their state. They acted with conviction, patience, and a profound belief in the values that make a nation strong: the rule of law, respect for human rights, democratic institutions, and the right of every citizen to shape the future — the very values that form the foundation of our European Union today.

The events of the 11th of March 1990 were not the culmination of a brief campaign, but the result of decades of cultural preservation and resistance. Our language, traditions, songs, and stories sustained us during the darkest times and became the foundation upon which a renewed Lithuania could be built.

Not to mention, our jokes. Allow me to share one from soviet times: A man walks into a shop in 1989 and asks, “You don't have any bread, do you?” The shopkeeper replies, “No, this is the butcher that doesn't have any meat. The bakery that doesn't have bread is across the street.”

It may be just a joke but it reflects the absurd reality of constant shortages, lies, hypocrisy, and oppression that Lithuanians refused to accept.

The first unsanctioned anti-Soviet demonstration in Vilnius took place on the 23rd of August 1987. Organized to mark the forty-eighth anniversary of the Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact, it became a decisive turning point, marking the beginning of Lithuania’s movement toward independence and the Sąjūdis era (the name of Lithuanian independence movement, equivalent to Solidarnosc in Poland). This demonstration signalled the beginning of open opposition to Soviet rule and paved the way for later historic actions, including the Baltic Way, when, exactly two year later, in 1989, approximately two million people joined hands to form a 675-kilometre-long human chain across Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania.

A few months later, on the 11th of March 1990, the Parliament adopted the Act on the Re-establishment of the Independent State of Lithuania, declaring that the sovereign powers of the Lithuanian state — abolished by foreign force in 1940 — were restored, and that Lithuania was once again independent. Let me be very clear, this was not the birth of a new nation, but the restoration of statehood previously suppressed by foreign occupation.

After fifty years of occupation and annexation by Soviet power, the Act opened a new chapter in our history. To borrow President Lenaerts’ expression of a “constitutional moment” in relation to joining the European Union, the 11th of March marked a constitutional moment in Lithuania’s history — without which later constitutional milestones would not have been possible.

The Act reaffirmed the continuity of Lithuanian statehood: meaning that the Act of Independence of the 16th of February 1918 never lost its legal force and, to this day, remains the constitutional foundation of the Republic of Lithuania. To consolidate this continuity, the validity of the pre-war Constitution of 1938 was restored and immediately suspended upon the adoption of the Provisional Basic Law, which remained in force until the current Constitution was adopted in 1992.

The day itself was marked by historic decisions. Parliament adopted legal acts restoring the state’s name and institutions and approved the national coat of arms, Vytis. At 6:08 p.m., the emblem of the Lithuanian SSR was covered and the national tricolour flag was raised in the Plenary Chamber. At 10:39 p.m., the newly elected Chairman of Parliament, Vytautas Landsbergis, announced that the Act had been passed with 124 votes in favour and six abstentions. At 10:44 p.m., Lithuania became free after fifty years of occupation.

The path to consolidating independence proved no less dramatic. The Soviet economic blockade of 1990–1991 was an unsuccessful attempt to force Lithuania to reverse its declaration. Oil supplies were cut, gas deliveries reduced, bank accounts blocked, and borders sealed. The nation’s resolve was put to the test by the tragic events of January 1991, which came to be known as the “Vilnius massacre”, whereby Soviet Armed Forces made violent attempts to seize Lithuanian institutions. Yet nothing broke the spirit or determination of the Lithuanian people.

In the years that followed, Lithuania transformed its institutions and constitutional order to reflect its regained freedom. Membership of the European Union and NATO were not merely strategic choices; they were the natural completion of Lithuania’s return to the democratic community of nations. These steps strengthened our economy, deepened the rule of law, and secured the peace and stability long hoped for by earlier generations. Today, Lithuania stands as a proud member of the European family — home to the happiest youth in the world according to the 2024 World Happiness Report and one of the most euro-optimistic societies in the EU, according to the 2025 Eurobarometer.

Commemoration is not only remembrance; it is also a call to reflection and action. The freedoms we enjoy require constant care. Democracy is never a finished project — it is a living system that depends on participation, vigilance, and dialogue across divides.

The war in Ukraine is a sober reminder that sovereignty can still be challenged and that peace must be defended. Lithuania and the European Union stand firmly with Ukraine. Our commitment is rooted in solidarity, in the memory of our own path to freedom, and in the conviction that Europe’s future rests on the rule of law and the right of peoples to determine their own destiny. If three million Lithuanians were able to seize their fate in such difficult circumstances, there is hope for all nations suffering under oppression today.

Today’s event also gives us the opportunity to pay tribute to one of Lithuania’s greatest legal scholars, Professor Mykolas Römeris, pioneer of Lithuanian constitutional law and the administrative law in the pre-occupation period. His contributions to the state, society, and legal science cannot be overstated. He served as justice of the Supreme Court, Rector of the University of Lithuania and as Lithuanian judge at the International Court of Justice in The Hague. He was one of the intellectual architects behind Lithuanian independence, and, above all, he was also a committed European who advocated for the same values upon which our Union stands today.

I am very grateful to the Court and in particular to the *comité des bâtiments* for accepting the joint proposal of the Lithuanian Members to dedicate this space in his honour. I also thank the Court's services for their invaluable assistance in organising this event.

It is a particular honour to welcome the delegation from Mykolas Römeris University, led by its Rector, President of the Conference of Rectors of Lithuanian Universities, as well as members of Professor Römeris' family.

Rector Žalėnienė will now deliver a welcome address, following which we will hear from Professor Ieva Deviatnikovaitė, who is the author of a book dedicated to Professor Römeris and who will provide us with some information about his life and legacy. We will conclude with another performance by our friend Ilan Schneider.