

**Speech by Robertas Vaitkus,  
teacher, Chairman of the *Bičiulystė* Society of Relatives of the Victims of  
January 13 and son of the freedom defender Vytautas Vaitkus  
killed on 13 January 1991  
at the sitting of the Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania  
dedicated to the 30th anniversary of 13 January 1991  
and the Freedom Prize 2021 award ceremony**

Today we are celebrating the 30th anniversary of the self-determination, will and resolve of our nation.

Back then, we clearly demonstrated, to both ourselves and the whole world, our noble purpose of seeking freedom and independence and our determination even to make sacrifices, if needed. And we did sacrifice a lot. On that night of 13 January 1991, we lost as many as 14 Lithuanian heroes who proved the conscious self-determination of their nation by shedding their own blood. Back then, we realized in our hearts how precious freedom was to each and every of us. Underage teenagers, women and the elderly – all stood up to defend Lithuania. We all realized that the decisive moment had come to be captured then or never. It is hard to imagine how the events would have unfolded if we had got frightened and disoriented and had failed to come to the defence of the Supreme Council after the tragic night of January 13th. To terrify us by brutal force – that must have been the idea of the Soviet Union. However, we were not scared. Instead, we became even stronger in our will and our determination, and we all came together as one to defend the Supreme Council. The scare, conversely, befell the Soviets and, first of all, Gorbachev. They realized that they were left only with two options, namely, to kill thousands of people or to give in. Thank goodness, common sense sufficed to opt for the second route.

Thirty years after those fatal events, one cannot help wondering whether we are still as strong in our hearts as once before, whether we really appreciate the things gained by sacrificing our lives, and whether materialism, egoism and selfishness have failed to take control over us. It happens quite often that one hears the questions as to what I have received from Lithuania, Landsbergis or somebody else. One rarely thinks about what I have given to Lithuania though.

When commemorating the tragic events of January, I will probably always remember the speech given by former partisan Bėda at the Seimas several years ago. Imprinted on my mind stay his words that despite so many years of freedom we have nevertheless failed to clean up the Soviet rubbish from our heads, names of our streets and squares, and our monuments. What kind of example can we show to our children by honouring the traitors of our nation? The explanation is actually always at hand as someone might have been a prominent writer, a poet or a person of merit. How many years has it taken us to mature enough to remove the Soviet statues off the Green Bridge in Vilnius? How long have we been crying and sobbing

over the potential loss of the great art, historical legacy, or some similar treasure? That is our disgrace and nothing else.

It took us nearly a quarter of a century to begin paying due tribute to our freedom fighters and partisans. For a quarter of a century, our consciousness has been struggling under the constraints of the Russian propaganda about the alleged bandits, fascists or other wrongdoers. Even today, the Soviet press and television aside, all who are still struggling for their freedom – be it Georgians, Ukrainians or Belarusians – are labelled fascists, nationalists, or similar evildoers. Even the fighters of January the 13th are called murderers because, ostensibly, we were shooting at our own people. I therefore hope that we all stay strong in our will and our determination and get rid of the Soviet legacy in our minds with no delay.

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