



## GREEN BRIDGE STATUES

Vilnius, Lithuania

54.6915, 25.2799

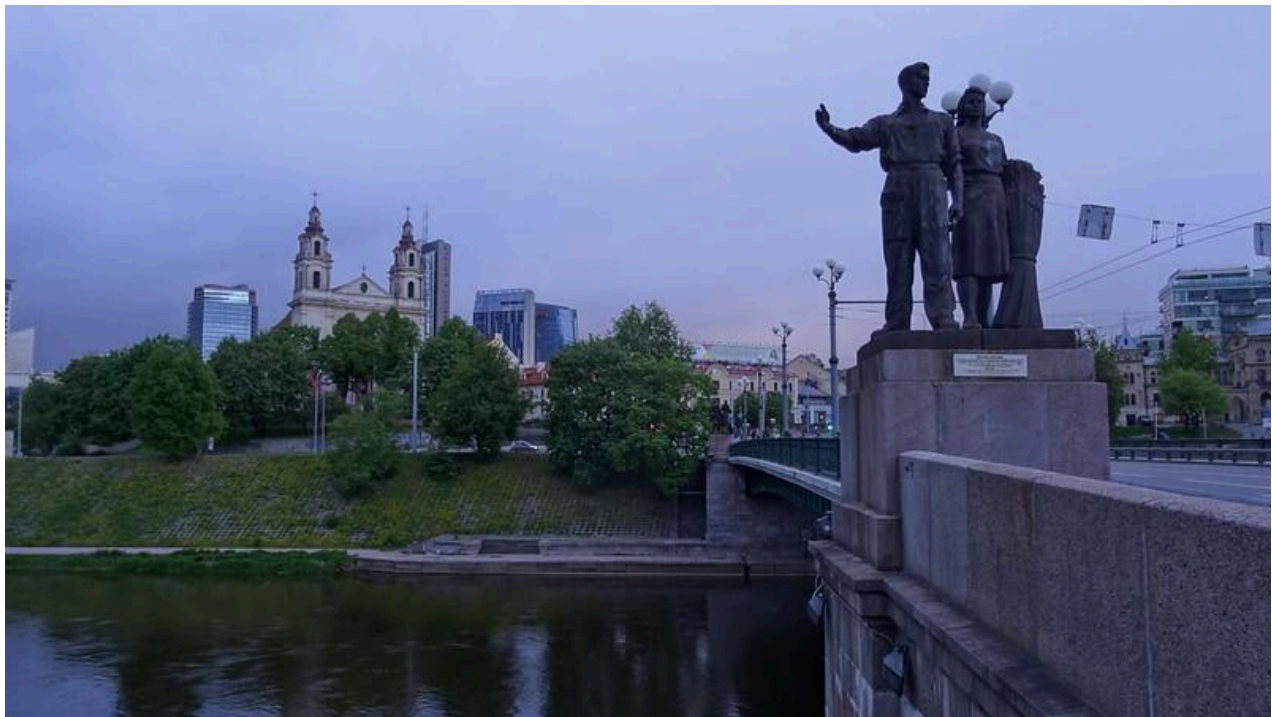


Image by Bogdan Tapu, courtesy of the owner.

### Executive Summary

The Green Bridge is located in the city centre of Vilnius, Lithuania, and since its rebuilding following the Second World War, it was decorated with four groups of statues created by multiple Lithuanian artists in the Socialist realism style. Discussions about the statues split Lithuanian society when some groups advocated keeping them due to their representation of the Soviet past, which marked half a century of the country's history. Meanwhile, others strictly condemned the monument's existence, which glorified a period marked with pain and suffering for the Lithuanian nation. After debates that lasted for decades, the remedy was made by the Vilnius City Municipality to remove the statues in 2015.

## Introduction

The Green Bridge was built in Lithuania's capital, Vilnius, in 1952 and was then decorated with four groups of statues that represented Soviet Union ideology. After the restoration of independence in 1990, Lithuania began to recreate its identity, which also involved rethinking its past while dealing with its heritage, such as the monuments created during the years of the Soviet occupation. Therefore, this heritage became contested in a split society: one side suggested keeping the statues due to their hurtful but authentic past. At the same time, the other side wanted the statues removed mainly due to their association with the repression that Lithuanian society suffered under Soviet occupation. Additionally, the region faced geopolitical challenges, such as the annexation of Crimea in 2014 and the war in Ukraine that began in 2022. Thus, 'cleaning' public spaces by removing Soviet monuments was seen at the time as a principal action towards aggressive de-Sovietization.

## Background

### *Lithuania in 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries*

Lithuania announced its independence for the first time in modern history after the First World War on 16<sup>th</sup> February 1918. During the Interwar years 1918-1939, the country built its own identity as a modern state with a combination of democratic and authoritarian political governments. It was known for its economic and technological achievements. Alongside economic growth influenced by the development of the agricultural sector, the country was known as a manufacturer of ANBO aircraft, which at that time was seen as a huge success for a small but ambitious country and its developing industry.<sup>1</sup>

After signing the secret Ribbentrop-Molotov pact, Lithuania fell under the influence of the Soviet Union, followed by the official occupation on June 15, 1940. Lithuania's nation and identity were obscured for 50 years, thus resulting in sweeping changes for the country's development. While European countries were rebuilding their cities and economies after the Second World War, Lithuania faced the tragic reality of deportations to Siberia, no freedom of speech, and censorship on social and cultural levels.

The government implemented policies of Sovietization, including building monuments that glorified those deemed socially, politically, and culturally important in the regime. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union and Lithuanian independence on 11th March 1990, the Lithuanian

---

<sup>1</sup> Edmondas Jakilaitis, LRT TV Show "Dėmesio centre", "A.Bumblauskas: tarpukario Lietuvą išgarsino ANBO lėktuvai, krepšinis ir sviestas", 15MIN, February 16, 2016.

state formed a new official historical narrative and memory culture that emphasised the motif of victimhood and the fight for independence.<sup>2</sup> Events such as Lithuania's occupation by the Soviet Union, the Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact, Soviet deportations, and the anti-Soviet resistance movement known as the Partisan War influenced and shaped such memory culture. Moreover, it impacted the perception of Soviet monuments and street names in Lithuania, which became widely discussed after independence in 1990.

### *Construction of the Bridge*

The Green Bridge is considered one of Vilnius, Lithuania's most popular and heavily trafficked bridges. The bridge was termed Green Bridge after it was painted green in 1766. It is the oldest bridge in Vilnius that connects the banks of the Neris river and stood as early as the 16th century.<sup>3</sup> Since then, the bridge has been rebuilt many times due to various nature-related incidents, including floods.

After wooden and metal iterations of the bridge were constructed and reconstructed over past centuries, the modern form of the bridge was built in 1949 after its demolition in 1944. Due to the Soviet occupation of Lithuania, the name of the Green Bridge was changed to be named after the Soviet general Ivan Chernyakhovsky, as he was considered a leader of the Red Army that 'liberated' the city from the Nazis. Four statues were built atop the Green Bridge in 1952 at the four corners of the bridge. The sculptures: 'Agriculture,' 'Industry and Construction,' 'Guarding Peace,' and 'Youth Education' were created by famous Lithuanian sculptors B. Bučas and P. Vaivada ('Agriculture'), N. Petrulis and B. Vyšniauskas ('Industry and Construction'), B. Pundzius ('Guarding Peace'), J. Mikėnas and J. Kėdainis ('Youth Education').<sup>4</sup> In this way, the sculpture construction symbolised and commemorated the new ideology of communism in Lithuanian society. These sculptures were part of Lenin's 1918 'Monumental Plan for Propaganda,' which encouraged statues to be tools of ideological advancements for the creation of a new Soviet society.<sup>5</sup>



Figure 1 The statue group named "Guarding Peace" on the Green Bridge in Vilnius, Lithuania

<sup>2</sup> Rasa Goštautaitė, "Dissonant Soviet monuments in post-Soviet Lithuania. The Application of artistic practices", *Baltic Worlds*. 2020, 4, p. 9-19.

<sup>3</sup> Lijana Natalevičienė, " Seniausias Vilniaus tiltas per Nerį", MMC, accessed on June 12, 2023

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Živilė Mikailienė, Jūratė Markevičienė "Stalininio laikotarpio Vilnius: Sovietinio mito formavimas", Seminar Patogus ir nepatogus paveldas, April 2, 2015, p. 72.

## History of the Contestation

### *The Origins of Removal of the Monument*

Discussions regarding the Green Bridge statues have circulated in private and public conversations for years. After Lithuania restored independence on March 11, 1990, most Soviet statues were removed for ideological reasons. According to the Lithuanian National Radio and Television in 1995, contestation over the statues breached national news when it was announced that there was a controversy between two groups in society: politicians who sought to demolish the statues and heritage practitioner communities who wanted the statues to remain.<sup>6</sup> Various opinions and arguments arose. One of the sculptors, Bronius Vyšniauskas, defended his work as it was related to the political climate at the time and pointed out the specific genre of the statue being militaristic.<sup>7</sup> Alternatively, a historian expressed his feelings that people should clean their minds from Bolshevik ideas and keep the monuments for future generations.

In 2008, there was a new law released that banned a demonstration of any symbols related to Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union, including flags, military uniforms, or coat of arms.<sup>8</sup> It meant a new wave of discussions about the remaining Soviet monuments that showcased typical symbols of the Red Army, such as a red star.

The question of the Green Bridge statues appeared in public again at the beginning of 2010 when employees at the Vilnius City Municipality pointed out the need for renovation of the sculptures due to their rusty appearance and critical condition.<sup>9</sup> The future of the Green Bridge statues was discussed during a seminar named 'The Comfortable and Uncomfortable Heritage'. The opinion was declared that having an extra sculpture – the chain under the bridge made by Lithuanian sculptor Kunotas Vildžiūnas - created a new meaning for the bridge both from an emotional and structural integrity perspective.

On 1st September 2013, a special event was organised next to the bridge, marking the twentieth anniversary of when the Soviet army left Lithuania.<sup>10</sup> The location intentionally emphasised a tragic past and the hurtful meaning the statues symbolised for Lithuanians.

---

<sup>6</sup> LRT "Panoramos archyvai. Skulptūros ant Žaliojo tilto", LRT, October 11, 1995

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> E-Seimas.lrs.lt, June 17, 2008

<sup>9</sup> Skaidra Trilupaitytė "Medijų kultūra ar „atminties transformacijos“? Žaliojo tilto atvejis ir kiti paminklai", Nacionalinis tapatumas medijų kultūroje / sudarė Žilvinė Gaižutytė-Filipavičienė, Vytautas Rubavičius. Kaunas: Kitos knygos, 2011. p. 84-102

<sup>10</sup> Jonas Burokas "Sovietinės okupacinės kariuomenės išvedimas paminėtas ir prie Žaliojo tilto Vilniuje", Voruta, September 4, 2013.

Meanwhile, during one of the discussions on Lithuanian National Radio in August 2014, the question was raised whether the statues should be demolished. Despite no cited statistics, the talk show's main conclusion was that most Lithuanians who answered the questions agreed to demolish them.<sup>11</sup> Further, an online survey was conducted in August 2014 by the news media group 15MIN with four possible answers to the question: should the statues on the Green Bridge be removed? In total, 9817 respondents answered, with 51% of voters declaring that the statues should be removed. Meanwhile, 32% of voters agreed it is a heritage site and should remain standing. Finally, 8% and 9% respectively chose the answers that the location of Green Bridge should become a place for art, social, and political activities or that the issue of the statues is not important.<sup>12</sup> These examples illustrate the difference between the two opinions in Lithuanian society without proof that the majority wanted to keep or remove the statues.

## Decision-Making Processes

2015 significantly increases the debate about the Green Bridge statues. According to the Head of the Lithuanian National Commission for Cultural Heritage, Gražina Drėmaitė, protecting the heritage of the monuments was extremely important mainly because the Vilnius City Municipality could make an easy decision if an object has no official protection.<sup>13</sup> Also, she expressed her position that the statues represent fifty years of a historical period of Lithuania and could serve as an educational and commemorative symbol for younger generations who did not experience the events.

In February 2015, in Kaliningrad, a part of Russia that borders Lithuania, a provocative poster was hung on the monument for a Prussian-Lithuanian theologian Liudvikas Rėza: 'Dalia (addressed to a former president of Lithuania), be careful – do not touch sculptures on the Green Bridge!'<sup>14</sup> It was unknown who hung the poster; however, a Lithuanian journalist, Virginijus Savukynas, reacted to this incident, claiming that the Green Bridge statues constituted part of the Russian information war against Lithuania that had been ongoing for years.<sup>15</sup> He noticed that discussions about the statues in the city centre of Vilnius had grown into unfriendly disputes and split the Lithuanian society, which was useful for Russia, a power that had been seeking regional control for decades.

During discussions, a historian and a Lithuanian Parliament member, Arvydas Anušauskas, declared that the statues should be removed mainly because they were built when the country

<sup>11</sup> LRT, Radio show "60 minutes", August 29, 2014.

<sup>12</sup> 15MIN, Violeta Grigaliūnaitė "Žaliojo tilto skulptūrų likimas paaiškės lapkritį, Artūras Zuokas nori jas palikti", 15MIN, August 28, 2014

<sup>13</sup> Elta, "G. Drėmaitė: jei Žaliojo tilto skulptūrų nesaugos valstybė, jų likimą spręs savivaldybė", LRT, October 31, 2014.

<sup>14</sup> BNS, "Šalia paminklo L. Rėzai Karaliaučiuje – raginimai neliesti Žaliojo tilto skulptūrų", LRT, February 8, 2015

<sup>15</sup> "Virginijus Savukynas. Žaliojo tilto skulptūros jau tapo informacinio karo prieš Lietuvą dalimi", LRT, February 10, 2015

witnessed mass deportations to Siberia.<sup>16</sup> He emphasised the victims who were strongly affected by the Soviet regime; thus, any monument that represents the past but also glorifies the ideology is an insult to the sovereign country and its people.

Finally, the first two statues were taken down at night from September 7 to 8, 2015. Two days later, the last two were also removed.<sup>17</sup> According to the experts who researched the condition of the statues, their declining physical integrity and eventual decay were inevitable, and an accident could have happened, potentially endangering pedestrians. This decision was further supported by increasing difficulty in the logistics of dismantling statues over time - as such, removing them sooner than later was safer and more feasible. The mayor of Vilnius at that time, Remigijus Šimašius, emphasised that the statues were removed due to safety issues and added that there were no future plans to renovate them.<sup>18</sup>

### *The Green Bridge Afterlife*

In 2016, almost a year after the Green Bridge statues were removed, The Central Bank of Russia released a special line of coins symbolising 'liberated' cities from Nazi Germany in the former Soviet Union states. One of the coins had a group of statues from the Green Bridge, 'Guarding Peace.'<sup>19</sup>

Even after deciding to take down the statues, the space where they stood was not left empty for long. Multiple installations were placed there; one was created by architect Audrius Ambrasas in 2021. The designer made metallic constructions that use cages as a symbol of the conflicted history of Lithuania. Additionally, the designer believed the new metal construction reflected the bridge's past before World War II when the bridge was made of similar construction.<sup>20</sup>

After the war broke out in Ukraine in 2022, Lithuanian artists decided to create a performance and use the space of the Green Bridge where former statues were located. The act was called "Be on duty" regarding the Lithuanian past in the early nineties when Lithuanians went to protect Parliament and media buildings from incoming Soviet tanks.<sup>21</sup> Being 'on duty' entails active civic engagement to protect your land from invaders – something that Ukrainians experienced since February 2022.

---

<sup>16</sup> Violeta Grigaliūnaitė, "Arvydas Anušauskas vietoj skulptūrų ant Žaliojo tilto siūlo pastatyti paminklą valstybingumui", 15min, February 9, 2015

<sup>17</sup> L. Giniotienė, "Naktį nuo Žaliojo tilto nukeltos pirmosios skulptūros", LRT, September 8, 2015

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> 15min, " Rusija dūrė į paširdžius – išleido monetą su Žaliojo tilto skulptūroms", 15min, August 3, 2016

<sup>20</sup> Evelina Joteikaitė, "Kritikos iš miestiečių dėl Žaliojo tilto dekoracijos sulaukęs Audrius Ambrasas: tai buvo galima prognozuoti", Delfi, August 30, 2021

<sup>21</sup> LRT, "Ant Žaliojo tilto vyko performansas: išreišk atjautą ir palaikymą karo siaubiamiems Ukrainos miestams", LRT, May 2, 2022

## Summary and Conclusions

The case study of the Green Bridge statues in Lithuania is considered one of the most discussed cases in public space since the country became independent three decades ago. It was seen as a representation of the tragic and difficult part of the country's history, and therefore, the case has earned many negative reactions from the public. Finally, the remedy was taken to remove the statues, which led to the creation of a new space for Lithuanian artists who could create various performances and installations. This change symbolises the re-creation of the Lithuanian national identity that seeks to take a strong position towards the conflicting past. Although critics see the decision as an attempt to delete one part of Lithuania's history, the final decision proves that perhaps not everything from the past should be tolerated and left untouched.

Research contributed by Ieva Čičirkaitė and Melanie Reixach-Wong

Last updated May 2024

## References

- 15MIN, Violeta Grigaliūnaitė. "Žaliojo tilto skulptūrų likimas paaiškės lapkritį, Artūras Zuokas nori jas palikti", 15MIN, August 28, 2014.  
[https://www.15min.lt/naujiena/aktualu/lietuva/zaliojo-tilto-skulpturu-likimas-paaiskes-lapkriti-arturas-zuokas-nori-jas-palikti-56-449348?utm\\_medium=copied](https://www.15min.lt/naujiena/aktualu/lietuva/zaliojo-tilto-skulpturu-likimas-paaiskes-lapkriti-arturas-zuokas-nori-jas-palikti-56-449348?utm_medium=copied).
- 15MIN. "Rusija dūrė į paširdžius – išleido monetą su Žaliojo tilto skulptūroms", 15MIN, August 3, 2016.  
<https://www.15min.lt/verklas/naujiena/finansai/rusija-dure-i-pasirdzius-isleido-moneta-s-u-zaliojo-tilto-skulpturomis-662-664147>
- BNS. "Šalia paminklo L. Rėzai Karaliaučiuje – raginimai neliesti Žaliojo tilto skulptūrų", LRT, February 8, 2015.  
<https://www.lrt.lt/naujienos/lietuvoje/2/92453/salia-paminklo-l-rezai-karaliauciuje-ragini-mai-neliesti-zaliojo-tilto-skulpturu>.
- Burokas, Jonas. "Sovietinės okupacinės kariuomenės išvedimas paminėtas ir prie Žaliojo tilto Vilniuje", Voruta, September 4, 2013.  
<https://www.voruta.lt/sovietines-okupacines-kariuomenes-isvedimas-paminetas-ir-prie-zaliojo-tilto-vilniuje/>.
- E-Seimas.lrs.lt, June 17, 2008. <https://e-seimas.lrs.lt/portal/legalAct/lt/TAD/TAIS.323461>.
- Edmundas Jakilaitis, LRT TV Show "Dėmesio centre". "A.Bumblauskas: tarpukario Lietuvą išgarsino ANBO lėktuvai, krepšinis ir sviestas", 15MIN, February 16, 2016.



- <https://www.15min.lt/naujiena/aktualu/lietuva/a-bumblauskas-tarpukario-lietuva-iscarsino-anbo-lektuvai-krepsinis-ir-sviestas-56-582737>.
- Elta. "G. Drėmaitė: jei Žaliojo tilto skulptūrų nesaugos valstybė, jų likimą spręs savivaldybė", LRT, October 31, 2014.  
<https://www.lrt.lt/naujienos/lietuvoje/2/75019/g-dremaite-jei-zaliojo-tilto-skulpturu-nesaugos-valstybe-ju-likima-spres-savivaldybe>.
- Giniotienė, L. "Naktį nuo Žaliojo tilto nukeltos pirmosios skulptūros", LRT, September 8, 2015.  
<https://www.lrt.lt/naujienos/kultura/12/108576/nakti-nuo-zaliojo-tilto-nukeltos-pirmosios-skulpturos>.
- Joteikaitė, Evelina. "Kritikos iš miestiečių dėl Žaliojo tilto dekoracijos sulaukęs Audrius Ambrasas: tai buvo galima prognozuoti", Delfi, August 30, 2021.  
<https://www.delfi.lt/kultura/naujienos/kritikos-is-miestieciu-del-zaliojo-tilto-dekoracijos-sulaukes-audrius-ambrasas-tai-buvo-galima-prognozuoti-88065725>.
- Rasa Goštautaitė. "Dissonant Soviet monuments in post-Soviet Lithuania. The Application of artistic practices", *Baltic Worlds*. 2020, 4, p. 9-19.
- Grigaliūnaitė, Violeta. "Arvydas Anušauskas vietoj skulptūrų ant Žaliojo tilto siūlo pastatyti paminklą valstybingumui", 15min, February 9, 2015.  
<https://www.15min.lt/naujiena/aktualu/lietuva/arvydas-anusauskas-vietoj-skulpturu-ant-zaliojo-tilto-siulo-pastatyti-paminkla-valstybingumui-56-483826>.
- Seimas.lrs.lt, June 17, 2008.  
<https://e-seimas.lrs.lt/portal/legalAct/lt/TAD/TAIS.323461E->
- Klimka, Libertas. "Sostinės Žaliojo tilto istorija", *Mokslo ir technikos raida Lietuvoje*. 2002, P. 125-133. Mokslo istorikų konferencijos, pranešimas įvykusios Vilnius, November 26, 2002.
- LRT. "Ant Žaliojo tilto vyko performansas: išreikš atjautą ir palaikymą karo siaubiamiems Ukrainos miestams", LRT, May 2, 2022.  
<https://www.lrt.lt/naujienos/kultura/12/1685425/ant-zaliojo-tilto-vyko-performansas-isreiks-atjauta-ir-palaikyma-karo-siaubiamiems-ukrainos-miestams>.
- LRT. "Panoramos archyvai. Skulptūros ant Žaliojo tilto", LRT, October 11, 1995.  
<https://www.lrt.lt/mediateka/irasas/2000209452/panoramos-archyvai-skulpturos-ant-zaliojo-tilto>.
- LRT. Radio show "60 minutes", August 29, 2014.  
<https://www.lrt.lt/mediateka/irasas/1013695578/60-minuciu-2014-08-29-17-00>.
- Mikailienė, Živilė, Markevičienė Jūratė. "Stalininio laikotarpio Vilnius: Sovietinio mito formavimas", Seminar Patogus ir nepatogus paveldas, April 2, 2015, p. 72.
- Natalevičienė, Lijana. "Seniausias Vilniaus tiltas per Nerį", MMC, accessed on June 12, 2023  
<http://www.mmcentras.lt/seniausias-vilniaus-tiltas-per-neri/79055#>.



Trilupaitytė, Skaidra. "Medijų kultūra ar „atminties transformacijos“? Žaliojo tilto atvejis ir kiti paminklai", Nacionalinis tapatumas medijų kultūroje / sudarė Žilvinė Gaižutytė-Filipavičienė, Vytautas Rubavičius. Kaunas: Kitos knygos, 2011. p. 84-102.<https://etalpykla.lituanistika.lt/fedora/objects/LT-LDB-0001:J.04~2011~1367170504353/datastreams/DS.002.0.01.ARTIC/content>.

Savukynas, Virginijus. "Žaliojo tilto skulptūros jau tapo informacinio karo prieš Lietuvą dalimi", LRT, February 10, 2015.  
<https://www.lrt.lt/naujienos/nuomones/3/92641/virginijus-savukynas-zaliojo-tilto-skulpturos-jau-tapo-informacinio-karo-pries-lietuva-dalimi>.

## Figures

Tapu, Bogdan. "Agriculture" sculpture on Green Bridge, May 13, 2015. (Cover Image)

Messer, Nathan. "Guarding Peace" on the Green Bridge.jpg." Personal Image, November 10, 2005. (Figure 1)

## About Contested Histories

Many contestations have been over memorials, street names, and other physical representations of historical legacies in public spaces in recent years. These contestations often reflect deeper societal tensions, whether triggered by political transitions, demographic shifts, inter-ethnic strife, or a growing awareness of unaddressed historical injustices.

Contested Histories is a multi-year initiative designed to identify principles, processes, and best practices for addressing these contestations at the community or municipal level and in the classroom. Conflicts about history, heritage, and memory are a global phenomenon. Although each case is different, comparative cases can indicate lessons learned and reflect best practices.

## About IHJR at EuroClio

The Institute for Historical Justice and Reconciliation (IHJR) is a research centre at the European Association for History Educators (EuroClio) in The Hague, The Netherlands. The IHJR works with educational and public policy institutions to organise and sponsor historical discourse in pursuit of acknowledgement and the resolution of historical disputes in divided communities and societies.

## Contact information

Paula O'Donohoe  
Program Director

Institute for Historical Justice &  
Reconciliation  
[contestedhistories.org](https://contestedhistories.org)

EuroClio - European Association of  
History Educators  
Bankplein 2, 2585 EV  
The Hague, The Netherlands  
+31 70 3817836  
[contestedhistories@euroclio.eu](mailto:contestedhistories@euroclio.eu)

To cite this publication:

*Contested Histories*, "Green Bridge in Vilnius, Lithuania", *Contested Histories Case Study #529* (May 2024), Institute for Historical Justice and Reconciliation (IHJR) at the European Association of History Educators (EuroClio), retrieved from [link], [CC BY 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).

*Contested Histories* is funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the authors only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA). Neither the European Union nor EACEA can be held responsible for them.

