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Great opportunities are always referred to as great challenges. Challenge to recognise it, dare to face it, and be ready to put it into action.

### A SHORT TOUR AROUND HISTORY

In 1990 Lithuania took on one of the biggest challenges in its entire history: it dared to re-establish its independence with the many consequences that that entailed. It strived to sustain energetic, economic and political independence from its former master and to steer its economic ship towards a playground with different rules – those of the market economy. Even though some fundamentals were still missing, the course of events had become just too fast to remain a passive observer. The European Union welcomed Lithuania as one of ten successful accession countries in 2004 and provided the most important inputs – a sense of stability and recognition. However, this brought over-confidence and a limited, yet relatively enormous cash inflow (one might term it an in-flood). After revelling in this feeling for all of three years, the economic crisis (aka the financial/mortgage crisis, the Great Depression) revealed a bursting bubble of over-optimistic expectations and the behaviours to go with it.

For some people, this is nothing but dull history. For others it is life, moments that one has to live through, remember, understand and respect. There are those who were ready for change, predicted it or simply were ignorant to everything that was happening, meaning that change brought no surprises. Second, there were people who were taught to be a part of society, whose ideology was subsequently destroyed; the rules changed and those who were quickest

to adapt managed to benefit. Third, there are people even now in pursuit of their identity, still feeling the proximity and remains of the past, yet now struggling in a tenuous present. Whew, sounds complicated. But here we are: experiencing the winds of change blowing straight into our faces and striving to persuade our parents that this time everything will be different. They listen to us, they agree, they nod, and try to believe that this time everything will be different.

### BEHIND THE VEIL OF FINANCE

I remember myself as a seventeen-year old pulling my mother by the sleeve to the bank and explaining the advantages of investment funds. My mother was suspicious. Pointers from a school-age daughter based on bank leaflets and web pages did not sound promising. Moreover, we had lived through a period of Ponzi “banks”, when the financial system looked like a big lottery pot filled with red balls though the winning one was blue. And subsequently, we saw life savings which had been worth a decent two-room flat stolen and then returned by the government decades later, in a sum now equal to a decent month’s salary. My mother, arguably, felt she had the right to be suspicious. The changes were constantly invading her personal budget. After buying her daughter’s first school shoes with roubles, the medium of exchange was replaced with vouchers, only then to be replaced by the litas. This meant that there was always an adequate supply of waste paper for the heating system; there was however less and less belief in the financial system. But she listened, she agreed, she nodded and she invested. And we were lucky – the investment was cashed out at the very beginning of THE year – i.e. 2007.

## TAKING A DIFFERENT LOOK

My mother cashed out and I cashed in. In the very beginning of THE year. The timing of my investment resulted in the philosophical “why!?” Philosophical, yet encouraging. So I tried to find an answer and still keep looking for it in my studies towards a BA in economics and business. And though I have not found the answer, university has helped me to recognise other essential truths. First, if you have a question, ask it. If you take an exam, you should be rewarded for your knowledge, not for the way you dress, look or behave. This is the complete opposite of what was happening at Lithuanian universities. I witnessed my brother dare to challenge and then struggle, having to repeat his exams eleven times and then deciding to continue his studies in another university. After this, I decided to pursue my bachelor’s degree in another country, at another university which plays according to Western rules. So I still keep surprising my parents and their friends when they realise that there is nothing wrong with contradicting authority (the university administration, in my case). In a constructive and reasoned way, of course.

Another thing that at first seems mysterious to my older relatives is that you are the sole master of your future. So if you have to do an internship, you have to put effort into finding it. In addition to this, there is no job waiting for a student in advance, right after the graduation party. This is the complete opposite of the playground of just twenty years ago. Then, life was a well-planned game with the controls in government hands. No need to choose, search, plan and worry. Not surprisingly, some people miss it, some hate it. The problem is that being independent means being able to choose; yet choosing means thinking and considering the choice made. Whew, lots of work to do.

## LEARNING TO FLY

A soul in tension that’s learning to fly

Condition grounded but determined to try

*Pink Floyd*

But here we are. Learning to choose from those that did not have a chance to do so. Learning to trust from those who trust nearly no one, sometimes not even themselves.

Nevertheless, we are happy. There are many serious reasons to be so, but I will now subjectively choose two. The very first one is that the past is still too close to us. It is still etched into our memory, education and heart. We live in a house built during “heroic” times, we have been taught by ideologically confused people, yet we love them unconditionally and drink green tea sweetened with honey in the evenings. The scar of the past gives us an advantage: we know how it SHOULD NOT BE. The past is here not to threaten – it is here to teach, so take the best out of it and remind yourself that it must not repeat itself.

One last word: the future holds promise for us. The European Union gave us stability and recognition – two important elements that create a belief in ourselves, in our ability to achieve and change the country for the better. Moreover, it serves as an example of how it SHOULD BE. And finally, free movement of goods, capital, services and people lead to better education and business opportunities. Opportunities that come hand-in-hand with challenges.

The challenge is to implement this change from “should not be” to “should be”. The playground changed, yet the values have remained the same.

We are ready to recognise it, to dare to face the challenge. We are ready to take action.

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