Not only historical event brought Lithuania and Germany together – the Germans and the Lithuanians, who hold similar views about the future of Europe, have also maintained ever growing levels of trade. Germany is one of the largest investors in Lithuania and according to the Lithuanian Government’s statistics, German tourists to Lithuania outnumber even Lithuania’s closest neighbours.

The magazine Made in Lithuania discussed the history, business trends and cultures of the two countries with the Lithuanian Ambassador to Germany, Evaldas Ignatavičius.

– Lithuania and Germany have been linked together by various historical events for centuries. What, in your opinion, are the most obvious links between these two countries today?

– Today almost everything links Lithuania and Germany: history, culture, business, and the Euro-Atlantic space. However, not always, or, to be more exact, rarely were these relations allowed to develop freely, historically speaking. Walls, hostile national blocks, divisions within Europe and the world have all separated us for many centuries.

These days both nations have the opportunity to learn from the past and to continue the better traditions between our two countries.

– Continuing the theme of history, when did Germany take part in the history of Lithuania?

– Germany has been part of the history of Lithuania since the very beginning – since the time Lithuania’s name was first mentioned. The monk Bruno, who wanted to baptise the pagans and was killed at the Lithuanian border, was from Germany. His journey, which ended in such a tragedy, is described in the Quedlinburg Annals. A copy of this
A book can be found in the Dresden Library.

In later years the Lithuanian and German roads crossed each other time and again and the countries became almost inseparable.

Not only Catholic Christianity reached Lithuania through Germany and Poland, but also reformation whose seeds were cultivated in Lithuania by Lithuanian students of theology who studied in Germany and who managed to convince over half of Lithuania’s Christian believers that their way was as valid.

Another important thing was the royal union by marriage between the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth and Saxony. Even nowadays we can see the coats of arms of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania in Dresden marking that union. Indeed, Dresden was the capital of Lithuania for some time. We can see the roots of the present-day European Union in that union – Lithuania, Poland and part of Germany were united into a block, which included a large part of Eastern and Central Europe.

The Germans will be surprised to hear that the famous German scholar and traveller George Forster, who took part in Captain James Cook’s expeditions, was a professor at Vilnius University. There are many forgotten cultural links between the two states.

– Germany has become a second motherland to many a Lithuanian. What historical elements created this situation?
– After the Second World War Germany became a second motherland to tens of thousands of Lithuanians. There were already dozens of Lithuanian gymnasiums, higher schools, societies, sport clubs based in the country. The Lithuanian press circulated in the camps and books in Lithuanian were published. For example, at that time a Lithuanian art and handicrafts school was opened in Freiburg. In later years, groups of Lithuanians carried these Lithuanian traditions to other countries in Western Europe and over the Atlantic Ocean. It is a pity that these important pages in the history of our

For the past five years Lithuania’s economy, which accounts for almost half of the total GDP of the three Baltic States, has maintained a GDP growth rate of between six and ten percent per annum. Lithuania’s successful economic performance has been praised by many sources: the Financial Times Group’s FDI Magazine surveyed 140 European cities and regions and has awarded Vilnius, the Lithuanian capital, the title of Baltic City of the Future twice, while the metropolis of Kaunas and Vilnius Region was named Baltic Region of the Future for having the largest economic development potential in the Baltic States. Additionally, the recent analysis by KPMG, a global business consultancy, which provides audit, tax and advisory services, has shown that Lithuanian producers are the most profitable among the Baltic States and exceed the average profitability of Central European producers. The research revealed not only that Lithuanian companies’ growth is the fastest among the Baltic States and exceed the average productivity growth of Central European companies, but also that they are more active in venturing into new markets. According to the prevailing expert opinion, Lithuanian companies are very
nation are not well known in Germany today. The most important centres of Lithuanian activity have not been continued nor have they been able to adapt to a changing culture. This forgotten history should be explored in the future.

Not all of history’s pages are a shining example: Germany was party to two divisions of the Lithuanian state, which tore Lithuania away from European culture and plunged it into the maelstrom of the Russian empire. These divisions also split and damaged Germany itself. Today the Lithuanians and Germans solve similar equations: they try to trace the roots of their states and their cultures in order to evaluate the consequences of the totalitarian regimes from which the two societies were able to liberate themselves.

– Let’s talk about business relations between Lithuania and Germany. What are they like today?
– Following the enlargement of the European Union, an increasing interest is shown in the Lithuanian and other Central European markets, as well as in the possibilities of their business partners. The removal of economic barriers, the cheap and highly qualified workforce, and the rapid growth rates are very attractive. Our business experience on the Russian and the Ukrainian markets, as well as the CIS markets is highly valued. I think that in the long run this eastern direction will become ever more significant to business relations between Lithuania and Germany.

Traditionally Germany remains at the top of the list of Lithuania’s economic partners. Last year volumes of trade reached nearly ten billion Litas. For several years now Germany has come second (to Russia) on the list of import partners. In 2004 Germany was first among Lithuania’s export partners and last year it was third (after Russia and Latvia). During the past few years the growth of trade constantly accounted for twenty per cent.

I want to express my satisfaction at the work that the German-Baltic Economy Chambers have been doing in Lithuania. They are situated in Vilnius and maintain good contact with the Embassy. On the other side, two LEPA representations operate in Germany with which we share the work of developing business relations. Most importantly, there are seven honorary consuls in important cities in Germany. One of their most significant functions is to encourage economic co-operation.

– How important are German investments in Lithuania?
– Germany is third on the list of foreign investors in Lithuania – about LTL 2.4 billion. Last year Germany’s share among foreign investors increased by nearly two per cent. Only some percentage points separate Germany from Sweden and Denmark at the top of the list. However, I think that German business has not exhausted its options in Lithuania yet. I believe that we will see significant investments besides those of E-ON – Ruhrgas, ERGO, and NORD LB.

– Are Lithuanian businesspeople successful in conquering the German market?
– There are more and more active Lithuanian companies in Germany. Achema, Kuršių linija, Fermenta, Ryterna, which have representations in Germany and are constantly increasing their volumes of trade, can be mentioned as the most important ones. Last year Achema opened its first terminal in Lübeck. Following the liberalisation of the services sector in the European Union, the number of Lithuanian enterprises in Germany will undoubtedly increase.

Last year a Lithuanian food shop was opened in a prestigious place – next to the National Opera House in Berlin. We hope it would be a sign for a real push towards getting our products to the German market. It would be nice to see more Lithuanian shops and restaurants there. We are currently planning to use a plot of land at the former Embassy of Lithuania in Berlin for a definitive purpose: a Lithuanian Centre of Culture and Commerce, a tourism bureau, offices for companies and shops, a Lithuanian hotel and a restaurant could all be situated there. We have prepared concrete proposals on this matter.
It is nice to meet Lithuanian representatives in almost all important exhibitions in Germany. The most frequented events are the agricultural exhibition Žalioji savaitė (The Green Week), the Tourism Fair in Berlin, CEBIT – the computer fair in Hanover, and the book fairs in Frankfurt and Leipzig. Last year a delegation of 200 businesspeople from Lithuania visited CEBIT. The majority of the businesspeople at the fair were happy to create good contacts with German partners. Many of them are engaged in joint industrial activities with German enterprises.

– Is it true that German tourists simply flood Lithuania and are currently the most frequent guests in the country that enchanted the German writer Thomas Mann?

– Indeed, the Germans obviously take first place among the foreign tourists who visit Lithuania – almost one fourth of the total. Last year about 150,000 German tourists visited Lithuania. In 2004 this figure increased by as much as 45 per cent and last year it increased once again.

One can find about a dozen travel guides about Lithuania, the Baltic States, and the Kaliningrad region in German bookshops. There are a lot of publications about us in the press and on television.

profitable because their business is very specialised and they hold very strong positions in their respective speciality area.

For example, 14 of the top 20 Baltic IT companies are Lithuanian. Lithuanian IT solutions and products received prestigious awards in international IT competitions, which were organized by Microsoft Corporation, Software Development Magazine, and others. The ICT sector is one of the most promising sectors in the country’s economy.

Additionally, Lithuania is often singled out among Central and East European countries as the undisputed leader in the field of biotechnology. Lithuania’s biotechnology firms export products to 42 countries around the world. Lithuanian biotechnology specialists have already established a name in Eastern Europe and in the Far East, are looking forward to exporting genetic engineering pharmaceutics, biochemical and chemical agents for genetic engineering to Western markets as well.

Laser technologies and devices produced by Lithuanian companies are exported to nearly a hundred countries. Lithuanian laser companies supply over half of the world market for high-energy pico-second lasers - they lead global production in ultra-fast parametric light generators.

Furthermore, for decades Lithuania has been a high-tech production centre for the military, space, and consumer electronics industries. Today demanding electronics giants such as Philips and Samsung outsource major components here. Lithuania is also first in refrigerator production among the Baltic States.

Lithuanian metal processing and automotive companies supply parts for Volvo, SAAB, Renault and other world-known companies, which demand high value and prompt delivery.

Finally, Lithuania’s plastics manufacturers were some of the first in Eastern Europe to produce multilayer PET packaging. Today Lithuania’s export-oriented plastics industry, with as many as three huge plants in only one of the Free Economic Zones, makes it the regional leader..

German businessmen have always been interested in the Lithuanian market. Germany has ranked as one of the top ten largest Lithuanian foreign trade partners and investors for years. Last year Germany was Lithuania’s No. 3 exports partner and No. 2 imports partner, as well as the 3rd largest investor in our country.
to purchase motorcars rather than to tour the country as visitors?

– I have often stated that we would like to see more tourists from Lithuania in Germany who would visit places of interest in Germany and recall the links that that country has with Lithuania in Berlin, Dresden or Freiburg. Unfortunately, thus far I have failed to come across a single travel guide to Germany in Vilnius bookshops. Though there are travel guides to Cyprus, Tunis or Thailand….

Hence, Germany for Lithuanians is still a country for transit, good motorways, and business relations rather than a tourist attraction centre where one can discover the forgotten roots of our country. I sometimes joke when I speak with my German friend: “You built too good motorways through which one can cross Germany in a day without stopping”. I hope that this situation will gradually change and Lithuanian people will rediscover Germany.

– What links could strengthen Germany’s and Lithuania’s ties in the future?

– After its unification Germany invested in modern infrastructure to connect both parts of the country: motorways, railways, energy and telecommunications routes. The state began to function as a single organism. These lessons should be extended from Germany to Lithuania – it is important to implement the ambitious VIA BALTIKA and RAIL BALTIKA projects as soon as possible and connect the branch of motorway through Kaliningrad region to the VIA HANSEATICA. Sea routes and the possibilities of port logistics are not fully utilised. Nevertheless, the historical traditions of the Hanza are gradually returning.

Within the historical space, relations between Lithuania and Germany and the Kaliningrad region are really interesting. As fate would have it, the cultural heritage of our two nations became intertwined in this enclave. Today this could form the sound basis for joint projects. However the region itself is not open enough to that yet. In the future it will undoubtedly find its place in the integration processes of the Baltic Sea Region.

– Germany’s leadership in regional energy projects causes concern to Lithuania, as it does to other countries. Will laying the gas-main without including Lithuania in its path not damage current relations?

– The “Wars of Energy” showed that the European Union could not stay dependent on a single source of energy, or on a single supplier. This “wake-up call” was necessary to make the whole of the European Union start discussing the need for a common energy strategy. As long as the heads of Lithuania and Poland were the only ones who commented on the project that would see gas-mains across the bottom of the Baltic Sea, few listened. Now these words have quite a different tone.

An intensive discussion about the future of energy began in Germany itself – the future of nuclear energy, renewable sources of energy, and diversification of supply are reevaluated. These discussions will have a great impact on the future energy strategy of the European Union.

Today the new Government of Germany maintains that in implementing the Baltijos dujotiekis (The Baltic gas-main) project, Lithuania and other regions energy safety, as well as environmental issues will have to be taken into consideration. Lithuania’s aspiration to connect to Central and Western Europe through energy joints will be supported.

– In your opinion, do the Germans and the Lithuanians understand the European identity in the same way?

– Lithuania and Germany, which have liberated themselves
After Lithuania’s accession to the EU, German economic interest in Lithuania has increased even further. German businessmen value competent Lithuanian employees and acknowledge the quick pace of economic development in the country. The Germans also find Lithuania’s experience in the Russian, Ukrainian and other CIS markets a big advantage when they do business with Lithuanian businesspeople.

Besides developing close mutual business cooperation, Germany and Lithuania share profound historical and cultural links. After World War II Germany became a home for thousands of Lithuanians who established a number of Lithuanian gymnasiums, societies and sports clubs in Germany. Today approximately 25 thousand Lithuanians reside in Germany. Furthermore, in 2008 Lithuanians will celebrate the 90th anniversary of the state’s independence, which was first acknowledged by Germany – the first country to do so. The Germans constitute the largest part – almost a quarter – of foreign tourists coming to Lithuania. Last year 150 000 German tourists visited our country. Finally, surveys by Baltic Surveys Ltd. (2004) and others revealed that the German nation is the most liked in Lithuania.

A close and long-lasting friendship between the German and Lithuanian people is the key to the two countries’ successful economic cooperation.

The Lithuanian Development Agency www.lda.lt, through its two representative offices in Offenbach am Main and Hamburg in Germany, invites business people to join the multitude of big corporate names who are already at home in Lithuania. Refresh your investment portfolio and discover new opportunities in a prospering Lithuanian economy, the largest and most diversified among the Baltic States. Get more value for money, do business in Lithuania!
The way in which a strategic partnership between the European Union and Russia, which thus far has been marked by a different understanding of values and principles, is going to develop, will depend on Germany’s position.

Both Lithuania and Germany are interested in achieving that the European Community’s values would be formed in the East. We do our utmost to jointly support this process by means of bilateral relations and the available EU instruments. Our co-operation with Germany in joint projects with Ukraine, the Caucasian countries or common actions regarding Belarus are quite effective. What form relations between these countries and the European Union or NATO will take in the future will depend mainly on the resolutions of these countries themselves and the reforms, which they have to carry out. However, intensive work by the European Union and NATO and a formulation of a comprehensive strategy with respect to these states will be of paramount importance. Lithuania and the other countries on the EU Eastern border, in co-operation with Germany, have their work cut out for them.

– What are the perspectives of cultural co-operation between Lithuania and Germany? As we know both countries have been related not only by political and economic links but also cultural ones since ancient times.

– It is important and symbolic to recall historical and cultural links between Lithuania and Germany and our culturally important dates. In 2008 we are going to celebrate the 90th anniversary of our state. We would not forget that Germany was the first to recognise the statehood of Lithuania. We plan to commemorate this day and perhaps even call this year The German-Baltic Year. In this way these links would be better understood by both the German and by our own people.

In 2009, when celebrating the millennium of Lithuania’s name, we plan to bring the only remaining copy of the *Quedlinburg Annals* to Lithuania from Dresden. By the way, today Quedlinburg is a UNESCO cultural heritage, therefore most probably, we would commemorate the anniversary of Lithuania’s name together with this town as well.

The most important cultural event regarding Lithuania this year in Germany is the days of culture in North Rhine-Westphalia, where over 100 events are going to be held simultaneously in different towns in that region. The *Christopher’s Orchestra* and the *Čiurlionis Quartet* will perform there. Lithuanian plays and films will be shown, and writers and artists will perform to a local and international audience. The importance of such grand events is unquestionable: the positive responses from the Frankfuft Book Fair in 2002 keep coming even today.

One of the most important cultural links, undoubtedly, is the legendary house of the German writer Thomas Mann in Nida and the annual festival held in his name.

– Is Lithuanian literature successful in appealing to the German reader?

– A large number of books by Lithuanian authors is published in Germany: a total of 47 books. Consequently, Lithuanian literature is known comparatively well here – from Kristijonas Donelaitis to the new authors. There are special links too – for example, the Klaipeda poet, Simonas Dachas, whose poem *Taravos Anikë* became a second anthem for Germany, or Johannes Bobrowski who introduced the themes of Lithuania Minor into German literature.

The contribution of Lithuanian musicians is also substantial. Today Maestro Daviadas Geringas who gave three concerts in the Berlin Philharmonic to commemorate the EU enlargement last year, promotes Lithuanian culture in Germany. During these concerts, many Germans heard M.Oginski’s *Polonaise* for the first time and the dramatic life story of this composer who came from Lithuania. It was a great pleasure to listen to the singing of Violeta Urmana in the new production of *Tosca* several weeks ago. In conclusion, it can be said that the main halls of Germany are no longer foreign to the Lithuanian artists.

– What could you tell us about the Lithuanian community in Germany? How did it form?

– Recently I took part in the events commemorating the 60th anniversary of the Lithuanian Community in Germany. It is a long way – from thousands of Lithuanians brought to Germany by the Soviet occupation after the Second World War to Lithuania’s return to the European family. The Lithuanian High School, February the 16th, in Hutenfield is in its fifties as well.

By the way, President Valdas Adamkus was also among those who migrated to the West after the war: he spent four years in Germany, graduated from Munich University, and met his future wife Alma there. Last year when visiting the town of Görlitz, which was divided by the border with Poland, the President remembered visiting it six decades ago, when he left occupied Lithuania. “You are therefore the second Head of state who visited our town after Napoleon”, joked the Burgomaster of Görlitz. By the way, the current President of Germany Horst Koehler was also flung by the war from his native town in current Poland first to East and later to West Germany.

– What are the Lithuanians in Germany mostly engaged in? What is the image of the community amongst other minorities?

– Today about 25 thousand Lithuanians live in Germany. The old emigrants are mainly concentrated in the western part of Germany. There are strong centres in the north of Germany, Hamburg, and Berlin as well. A year and a half ago Lithuanian Saturday schools were founded.

Several dozens of students from Lithuania study at almost every University in Germany. Germany did not open its market, as did, say, Ireland or Britain. As a result, the “new emigrants” did not flood it. However, according to the systems of various quotas and permits allotted to highly qualified physicians, specialists in informatics, scientists and artists many Lithuanians were able to find work in Germany. They are really excellent specialists who, due to their experience, can help advertise Lithuania and develop co-operation.

The Lithuanians are not a “parallel society” in Germany at all – as can be said about other ethnic communities. They all speak German very well, have jobs, and have integrated into the local society. These days, when there are no longer any obstacles to develop their Lithuanian business and contacts with their motherland, they are gradually beginning to be a good connection between Lithuania and Germany. In doing that they build on the work undertaken by the Embassy and other Lithuanian institutions.

I am convinced that experience and energy from both the old and new immigration can be successfully used for the common good.

– Thank you for the interview.