

HIDDEN BRIDGES, REDISCOVERED PATHS: ICELAND – LITHUANIA THROUGH TIME

– a Conference in Jörundur G. Hilmarsson’s (1946–1992) memory

Vilnius University and other venues

5-6th of June, 2026



Iceland holds an almost mythical place in Lithuanian cultural memory as a political David – a small but courageous nation that was the first to express political support for Lithuania’s independence through the Icelandic Althing’s vote on 11 February 1991, followed by the establishment of diplomatic relations in August of the same year. The year 2026 will mark the 35th anniversary of these historic milestones. Since then, political, business, and cultural ties between the two countries have steadily deepened. Today, an Icelandic community has taken root in Lithuania, while the Lithuanian diaspora in Iceland ranks among the country’s largest foreign communities. Diplomatic relations are maintained through ambassadors accredited to each other’s states, complemented by active honorary consulates in both countries.

However, little is known about the earlier history of these ties, which can be traced back to the Viking era, took intriguing turns during the interwar period and World War Two, and persisted throughout the Cold War. A key figure who maintained this thread at a time when no official links were possible – since Lithuania did not exist as an independent state – was the linguist and specialist in Indo-European languages, including Lithuanian, and pioneer of Tocharian studies, Jörundur G. Hilmarsson. He was the first to conduct the Icelandic seminar at Vilnius University, the first to teach Lithuanian at the University of Iceland, the first translator of a Lithuanian book into Icelandic, and the first Honorary Consul of Lithuania in Iceland. He would have turned 80 in 2026, and this conference is dedicated to his memory.

The conference will feature a series of talks examining the parallels, contrasts, and interactions between the two countries over time, while also addressing topics directly connected to Jörundur Hilmarsson’s academic and cultural legacy. The conference will also feature an exhibition dedicated to Jörundur Hilmarsson’s memory, followed by a second exhibition by the Icelandic artist Þorgerður Jörundsdóttir who is Jörundur Hilmarsson’s daughter.

PROGRAM

Friday, June 5, 2026 | Vilnius University

Aula Parva, Universiteto g. 3

10:30 Opening of the Conference

H.E. Ambassador of Iceland Harald Aspelund

Honorary Consul of Iceland Mr. Dalius Radis

Rector Prof. Rimvydas Petrauskas

Dean of the Faculty of Philology Prof. Mindaugas Kvietkauskas

Director of the Institute for Languages and Cultures of the Baltic Dr. Erika Sausverde

11:00–11:45

Guðni Thorlacius Jóhannesson (University of Iceland, President of Iceland 2016–2024)

Morality and Expediency. Icelandic-Lithuanian Relations, 1918–1988

11:45–12:15 COFFEE BREAK

12:15–12:45

Ieva Steponavičiūtė Aleksiejūnienė (Vilnius University)

Lithuanians in Iceland around World War Two

12:45–13:15

Rósa Magnúsdóttir (University of Iceland)

From Vilnius to Reykjavík: Writers, Cultural Diplomacy, and the Politics of Exchange in the Cold War

13:15–13:45

Erika Sausverde (Vilnius University)

Iceland, M. I. Steblin-Kamensky, and the Formation of Scandinavian Studies at Vilnius University

14:00 LUNCH

16:00–17:30 Official opening



Exhibition of Þorgerður Jörundsdóttir's artwork

18:00–19:00 Panel talk: *Between Lithuania and Iceland: Shared (Hi)stories of Politics, Culture, and Lives*



Festival: Takk, Ísland (Ačiū Tau, Islandija) | Islandijos street, Vilnius

Participants: Prof. Guðni Thorlacius Jóhannesson (University of Iceland, President of Iceland 2016–2024), dr. Ásthildur Jónsdóttir (art curator), Titas Mantas Urbonas (Founder of the festival “Takk, Ísland”), dr. Rasa Baranauskienė (Vilnius University). Moderator Ieva Steponavičiūtė Aleksiejūnienė (Vilnius University)

Saturday, 6th of June | Vilnius University

Aula Parva, Universiteto g. 3

9:30–10:00

Loreta Vaicekauskienė (Vilnius University)

Comparing the Incomparable: On Language Preservation in Iceland and Lithuania

10:00–10:30

Aurelijus Vijūnas (National University of Kaohsiung, Taiwan)

Teaching Lithuanian and Icelandic /remote presentation/

10:30–11:00 COFFEE BREAK

11:00–11:30

Rasa Baranauskienė (Vilnius University)

Translating Icelandic Literature into Lithuanian

11:30–12:00

Ugnius Vizgirda Mikučionis (Western Norway University of Applied Sciences)

Vikings Meeting the Curonians in Icelandic Sagas

12:00–12:30

Miguel Karl Villanueva Svensson (Vilnius University)

Jörundur Hilmarsson's Contribution to Baltic Studies and Indo-European Linguistics

12:30–14:00 LUNCH BREAK



14:00–15:00 Opening of the exhibition dedicated to the memory of Jörundur Hilmarsson | Vilnius University Library

Living Memory of Jörundur Hilmarsson with Jörundur Hilmarsson's family members, Rimantas Matulis & Irena Matulienė, and Giedrė Kadžiulytė.

For more information about the events please contact Ieva Steponavičiūtė Aleksiejūnienė
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