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## **The Cemeteries of the Soviet Soldiers Killed in the Vilnius Region—Their Transformation After World War II and Their Present State. A Case Study.**

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# THE CEMETERIES OF THE SOVIET SOLDIERS KILLED IN THE VILNIUS REGION —THEIR TRANSFORMATION AFTER WORLD WAR II AND THEIR PRESENT STATE A CASE STUDY

## Abstract

As many as 7465 Soviet soldiers died during fighting against the German troops in July 1944 in the Vilnius region (today's Lithuania). After World War II, the Soviet authorities turned the soldiers' burial sites into cemeteries and war memorials. Located in towns and cities, these places of remembrance served to perpetuate the Soviet perspective on World War II and the Soviet ideology. Nonetheless, the burial sites have been regarded as foreign elements in the region, both culturally and ideologically. After 1990, the Lithuanian government adopted new national and international regulations concerning the burial places of soldiers killed during World War II. In 1992, the local authorities in Nemenčinė (Polish: Niemenczyn) organized an official ceremony during which the remains

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**Keywords:** Vilnius region, cemeteries and monuments of the Soviet soldiers, transformation, Soviet ideology, historical memory, Lithuania, international regulations, Nemenčinė, Niemenczyn, orthodox cross

**Abstract:** As many as 7465 Soviet soldiers died during fighting against the German troops in July 1944 in the Vilnius region (today's Lithuania). After World War II, the Soviet authorities turned the soldiers' burial sites into cemeteries and war memorials. Located in towns and cities, these places of remembrance served to perpetuate the Soviet perspective on World War II and the Soviet ideology. Nonetheless, the burial sites have been regarded as foreign elements in the region, both culturally and ideologically. After 1990, the Lithuanian government adopted new national and international regulations concerning the burial places of soldiers killed during World War II. In 1992, the local authorities in Nemenčinė (Polish: Niemenczyn) organized an official ceremony during which the remains of the Soviet soldiers were transferred from the town centre to a municipal cemetery. A red star on the monument was then replaced by an orthodox cross. Such changes may help to relieve the towns and cities from the bitter legacy of the former Soviet ideology. After 2000, using the Lithuanian international obligations, the Russian side began reconstructing and contemporizing the places of remembrance by placing the symbol of the orthodox cross next to the symbol of the red star. This may, in time, change the attitude of the local communities towards such places. However, Lithuanian authorities are inclined to believe that the cemeteries of the Soviet soldiers may become a "Trojan horse" and have an adverse effect on Lithuania.

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