Smetona’s Daily Routine

At the end of 1919, after Poland had taken Vilnius in April and Kaunas had become the provisional capital of Lithuania, the presidential residence was established in the former Kaunas governor’s palace, now the historic prezidentūra. The small two-story building became the place for the president to work and live. On the second floor, on the façade side, there were two reception halls, furnished with Louis XIV style furniture and Persian rugs. Behind the second, smaller room was the president’s office. Behind the larger hall were the dining room and a smaller room where a nurse would sleep. On the first floor was a bedroom with an anteroom and a bath. Near the formal entrance was a large waiting room, which was at times the room of the military guard, and behind it, a large adjutant’s office, at times a waiting room for guests and visitors. The family’s quarters had a separate entrance from the other side – a small hall, Mrs. Smetona’s bedroom with an antechamber, their son’s room, a small bedroom, and a servant’s room and a bath. Behind the prezidentūra was a small garden, separated from Lukšys street by a high stone wall and not visible from the street – that was where the president took walks.535

Figure 32 Presidential residence in Kaunas (prezidentūra).
The Smetonas’ children grew up. Their daughter Marija in 1927 married her father’s adjutant, a cavalry officer, Colonel of the General Staff Aloyzas Valušis. The sympathetic and highly intellectual daughter, who knew French, German, Polish and Russian, always delighted her parents with her appearance. The Smetonas’ son Julius (b. 1913) loved sport, especially tennis, and it would seem the parents had more concerns with him. The President took care that Julius met his military obligation without protection or exception. Several times the President visited his son in his unit. After military service Julius Smetona married the pianist Birutė Nasvytytė, the daughter of Jonava pharmacist Steponas Nasvytis, and in 1937–1939 he studied civil law in Paris.

Smetona’s daily routine was demanding. He arose at 9 am, after an hour had breakfast, and listened to the information collected by his adjutant. After breakfast, in his office, the adjutant would give him the daily report, including references to received letters, correspondence. Each day 50–100 letters would come, many with appeals for help. There were also governmental reports: bulletins from the Security Department, the Defense Ministry, ELTA bulletins, ministers’ reports. Also many requests to help, give money, to find work.

In Smetona’s personal archive there are also many warnings, admonitions to be careful, well-wishers’ reports about attacks being planned against him. The partisans of Voldemaras piled up letters and telegrams to the prezidentūra, urging Smetona to work together with Voldemaras, not to split with him. Even some Jews supported Voldemaras: rabbis in Rokiškis and Obeliai sent Smetona a letter addressing him as “Samuel of the Lithuanian nation, we want to see a common government with You and Voldemaras in charge.” In a letter of February 3, 1929, an unknown officer of the infantry warned Smetona that he and others supported Voldemaras because “there are rumors that You are in a position like the Russian [Tsar] Nicholas: The Tsar’s wife and Rasputin ruled, not he who should rule. They consider You a person of weak will.” Another anonymous letter of May 12 warned that people were preparing to kill Smetona on May 15 in Parade Square when he was to greet the army. Three persons would open fire from a distance. A soldier, with the code name “Terrorist,” was preparing to shoot Smetona from close as the president passed by his unit. Such letters aroused concern, and they disturbed work and confidence.

From 11 am to 1 pm, the president would receive visitors: ministers, administrators, and village and farmer delegations. After this he could walk in the Karmėlava forest or to Upper Panemunė. After the walk, now early afternoon, he would have dinner and then nap a bit. About 5 pm he would again return to his office and read the remaining correspondence and the press. His favorite political daily was the Swiss Journal de Genève. At 8 pm he usually had supper with his family and the officers of the prezidentūra. His favorite food in summer