ROMUVA’S JOURNEY TOWARD STATE RECOGNITION: ACHIEVEMENTS AND CONTINUING CHALLENGES

EUROPEAN CONGRESS OF ETHNIC RELIGIONS (ECER)

ATHENS – 3–5 OCTOBER 2025

- Baltic indigenous faith rooted in reverence for nature and ancestors
- Continuity through folklore, seasonal festivals, and sacred songs (dainos)
- Despite Christianisation, rituals survived within folk customs
- Represents an unbroken link to pre-Christian European spirituality

Revival and Founding of Romuva

- Revival began in the 1960s under Soviet rule as part of cultural awakening
- Founded by Jonas Trinkūnas and circle of folklorists and ethnographers
- From folklore to a living spiritual community after 1990 independence
- Romuva officially registered in 1992

Principles and Practice

- Reverence for fire (ugnis) as sacred presence
- Harmony with nature, ancestors, and moral community
- Ritual calendar aligned with solstices and equinoxes
- Music, song, and communal ritual as means of renewal

Legal Context

- Recognition Framework in Lithuania
- Lithuania’s law defines “traditional”, “state-recognised”, and “other” faiths
- Recognition grants equality, rights, and access to state support
- Romuva applied under state-recognised category
- Required to demonstrate historical continuity and ethical value

2019 Parliamentary Rejection

- Political and Social Resistance
- Seimas (Parliament) voted against Romuva’s recognition in 2019
- Decision influenced by political pressure and Catholic hierarchy
- Sparked national debate about identity and religious freedom
- ECER and international allies expressed solidarity

Appeal to ECHR

- Seeking Justice in Europe
- Romuva appealed to the European Court of Human Rights
- Claimed discrimination and breach of religious freedom
- Case symbolised struggle for equal treatment of indigenous faiths
- ECER support helped raise visibility and legitimacy

ECHR Ruling (2021)

- Victory for Equality
- Court ruled Lithuania violated Romuva’s rights
- Affirmed state neutrality and freedom of belief
- Set precedent for other European indigenous movements
- Paved the way for re-submission to Parliament

Recognition (2024) - Historic Milestone

- Parliament reconsidered and granted recognition
- Romuva gained legal equality with other faiths
- Symbolic victory for indigenous European spirituality
- Celebration across Baltic and ECER networks

Impact of Recognition

- New Rights and Opportunities
- Vaidilos (priests) can now perform legally valid marriages
- Covered by state social insurance (SODRA)
- May teach Romuva religion in confessional schools (pending programme approval)
- As Inija Trinkūnienė notes: recognition brings both rights and responsibility

Cultural and Social Meaning

- Recognition affirms Lithuania’s spiritual heritage
- Encourages public understanding of pre-Christian traditions
- Strengthens identity and interfaith dialogue
- Shows Europe’s spiritual diversity as living, not historic

Continuing Challenges

- From Law to Lived Equality
- Despite recognition, challenges persist
- Public misconceptions and marginalisation remain
- Need for greater inclusion in cultural and media life
- Ongoing dialogue with state and church institutions

Practical Struggles (The Need for a Temple)

- Romuva still lacks a dedicated temple or sacred space
- No permanent home in Vilnius for sacred fire and rituals
- A temple in Vilnius would affirm indigenous heritage in national landscape

Faith, Perseverance, and the Path Ahead

- Recognition was a milestone, not an end
- True equality requires understanding and respect
- The journey toward full recognition continues — not only in law, but in the lived experience of faith.