

Lithuania Gives Yeltsin a Top Award Posthumously

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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Former first lady Naina Yeltsina kissing an award as she accepts it from President Dalia Grybauskaite in Vilnius. **Mindaugas Kulbis**

Lithuania's leader on Monday presented the widow of former President Boris Yeltsin with one of the country's highest awards in recognition of Yeltsin's personal contribution to its independence.

Lithuanian President Dalia Grybauskaite handed the Order of the Cross of Vytis to Naina Yeltsina during a ceremony in the presidential palace in Vilnius.

Yeltsin, as president of the Russian republic, condemned a Soviet military crackdown on independent-minded Vilnius on Jan. 13, 1991, and signed an agreement recognizing Lithuania as a sovereign state on July 29 — about a month before the Soviet Union reluctantly followed suit.

Lithuania was the first republic to break away from the Soviet Union.

Grybauskaite said Yeltsin had changed the mindset of Russians and opened the door for international recognition of the Baltic states.

"As it was breaking away from the Soviet past, the new democratically minded Russia stood capable of evaluating history objectively and recognizing the independence aspirations of the Baltic states," she said at the ceremony, according to a transcript [published](#) on her office's website.

"This position was put into action by Boris Yeltsin. Lithuania is grateful to [the] Russia of those days."

Yeltsina, who kissed the award as she accepted it, said at a separate meeting that Lithuania had held a special place in her husband's heart.

"Boris Nikolayevich loved Lithuania a lot," she told Lithuanian parliamentary Speaker Irena Degutiene, Interfax reported. "And it was not just words. It was confirmed by his actions."

Yeltsin died in 2007 at the age of 76.

The Lithuanian award is conferred on people deemed to have heroically defended the country's freedom and independence.

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