

IS LITHUANIA A NORTHERN OR CENTRAL EUROPEAN COUNTRY?

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During the rebirth period, i.e. during 1988-1990, when Lithuania was trying to comprehend who it was and where it stood in the global scheme of things, the main issue for Lithuanians was to determine their country's coordinates along an East-West axis. This was quite natural because Lithuania was seeking to regain what it thought was its proper place, after being forcefully torn away from the Western world and incorporated into the Eastern world. After Soviet liberalization and the Lithuanian national renaissance made it possible to talk about Lithuania's future in public fora, there began discussions about Lithuania's prospective shift towards the West. Even before the re-establishment of independence, scholars who were writing about Lithuania's place in Europe, including the author of this article, considered it entirely natural that Lithuania would shift westward in a political and cultural sense. Nevertheless, it was apparent that Lithuania's integration into an ever closer European community of nations would represent a difficult task psychologically for a nation which was attempting to free itself from a different "community of nations." (see Nekrasas, 1990) In essence the road led from one Union towards another Union, but the people apparently were determined to proceed.

The process of shifting confronts a nation or a state with various tasks and issues, without regard to the geographical direction in which "movement" takes place, whether it is west, east, north or south. It would therefore be appropriate to identify at least the most important problems before beginning an investigation into some questions related to Lithuania's self-identification, including the determination of the country's geo-political location, the establishment of foreign policy priorities and, finally, even the setting of the direction of economic and cultural development. In discussing these complex questions it evidently would be useful to differentiate among the following: (a) Where have we been; where are we now and where are we going? (b) What kind of people are we; how do we perceive ourselves to be and how do others perceive us? (c) What do we already have; what do we wish to achieve and what can we realistically expect? (d) To what extent is our place in the world predetermined by others and how free are we to choose where we wish to be? It would be useful to take into account all these aspects in discussing Lithuania's geopolitical as well as cultural identity, but this should best be left to a major monograph, and not to an article of limited scope. We will, however, take into account at least the circumstance that these aspects are *different*.

In fixing Lithuania's coordinates on the East-West axis, we must state that, with some reservations, Lithuania was a part of the Western world from the introduction of Christianity to the third partition of the Lithuanian-Polish state in 1795, and from 1918 to 1940 (See Bumblauskas, 1996, for a discussion of the reservations.) Of course it is necessary to specify what this article considers to be Western, for the concept of the West has many meanings. One of the most important is the following: The Western world includes the countries which have assumed the religious, cultural and, in part, political inheritance of the Western Roman Empire. The contemporary boundaries of this world certainly are not identical to those which Emperor *Theodosius* drew in the year 395, when he divided up the empire between his two

sons. But the subsequent development of the Ancient and Medieval World, in which religion played a conspicuous role, had a profound influence on the contemporary world. For even the confrontation line between communism and liberal democracy during the Cold War had a certain connection to the boundary drawn more than one thousand five hundred years ago. And in 1500 A.D. the eastern boundary of the Western world, or Western civilization, was definitively set and coincided with the eastern limits of the expansion of Western Christianity, as Huntington would say. (See Huntington, 1993, 1996) We may argue with Huntington on the most varied of issues, but we must admit that this line coincides almost ideally with the eastern boundary of the European Union and the most realistic candidates for EU membership. In this regard the present division of Europe (from which we cannot escape in the near future) is clearly more natural than, shall we say, the division of 1980.

Thus Lithuania was a part of the Western world, both from the end of the XIVth until the end of the XVIIIth century and at the beginning of the XXth century. It was forcibly "transferred" to the Eastern world, and that is why it is not strange that from the rebirth period Lithuania sought to return to the Western world as soon as possible. To be sure, there was no lack of resolve previously, for example, during the uprisings of 1831, 1863, 1941 or the armed resistance of 1944-1952. But this time fate was better disposed towards Lithuania. To be more precise, Lithuania took advantage of favorable political conditions in 1990, as well as in 1918. The difference between these two critical moments was that in 1990, Lithuania took advantage not so much of opportunities but rather very actively created a new situation not only in Lithuania, but also in all of Europe.

The re-establishment of independence in 1990 represented a major step towards the West and initiated a process which acquired great momentum. Today we can confidently say that, in this respect, our geographical standing is sufficiently clear. One again, we are in the Western world in a cultural, political and economic sense. During the eight years which have elapsed since the re-establishment of statehood, we have made notable progress in integrating into European and trans-Atlantic structures. The entry into force of the Lithuanian-European Union Association Agreement on February 1, 1998, is a prominent milestone on the road to the West. Although Lithuania has so far not been invited to begin negotiations with the EU regarding full-fledged membership, almost no one doubts that the negotiations will start before long (how long is another question). Being in the geographical center of Europe, we are economically and politically in the West. It is crucial not only that we clearly comprehend this, but also that others see our place there. In this respect there is not much difference between reality, our aspirations and our possibilities. Even Russia, which is trying to retard our integration into trans-Atlantic security structures, essentially does not doubt that Lithuania is a Western country.

In Lithuania almost everybody is in agreement regarding Lithuania's Western identity, with the exception of the small number of S. Salkauskis adherents (who maintained that Lithuania is *between* East and West), the radical nationalists, a handful of Eurosceptics and one or two surviving pagans (whether real or imagined). But this accord leaves another question open: in which part of the Western world are we, wish to be or can be? The answer to this question - the most important aim of this article -

cannot be presented by simply pointing to Lithuania's location on a political or some other kind of map. Self-identification - not only of an individual, but also of a nation or a state - always involves a *choice*. We must ask ourselves what we wish to belong to, and the word *belong* absolutely does not mean (or does not necessarily mean) being a part of another state. We are primarily concerned with the question: with which region does Lithuania identify itself: where does the country seek, or should seek, good friends, or at least its best neighbors; with whom does Lithuania primarily strive to develop relations; whom can it rely on most and whom does it consider most important.

This question can be treated as a psychological or culturological issue, but it also has a very significant political dimension. We quite often become a part of that which we most want to be and strive to be. Regional self-identification is in part conditioned by geography, history, religion and culture. Many believe that these things cannot be changed. It would seem that Lithuania cannot conceive of itself as a Mediterranean Sea state simply because it is not one. But even in this apparently obvious case it is advisable to be careful. The social world, which comprises the political and, more specifically, the international and foreign policy spheres, is less clearly defined than nature. It is *contrived* both intellectually and spiritually as well as practically and politically. History is not only something that was. It is subject to re-writing and re-interpretation. Different nations see it entirely differently. This is asserted not only by specialists of history or social science, but also by far more practical people. Not so long ago, Jan Widacki, former Polish Ambassador to Lithuania, quite accurately noted that, in the long history of Lithuanian-Polish relations, the two peoples perhaps agree on only one event, namely the Battle of Zalgiris (Grunwald) (See Widacki, 1997, p. 40). Yet even in this instance their views are not completely identical. The Poles believe that the allied forces were led by Jogaila (Jagiello), whereas the Lithuanians are convinced that Vytautas was the real commander. It may seem that geography constrains the search for identity even more than history. Yet even geography cannot lock up anything in a steel cage. Lithuania is not a Mediterranean state. Being a Western country, however, Lithuania is at the same time a part of Mediterranean civilization because the sources of Western civilization lie in ancient Greece and Rome. Moreover, Lithuania once extended to the Black Sea, in other words to the Mediterranean Sea basin. Besides, countries and peoples change their territories. Lithuania's territory today is quite different from what it was in the time of Vytautas the Great. After World War II, the territory of our neighbors the Poles was pulled a couple of hundred kilometers westward as if it were a blanket. In this century there were proposals to move Lithuania even further away - to America or Africa. Serious authors (see Pakstas, 1991, p. 94-95) discussed a plan to create a Lithuanian province in North America, a "New Lithuania," which would surpass that of the old homeland ten times over in its territorial extent. Although this may prompt us to smile, we should recall that these discussions were made meaningful by the approach of World War II. The War threatened to totally destroy the Lithuanian people. In fact, a significant part was destroyed, and a third ended up in America and Siberia, a land whose climate our pre-war geopoliticians considered to be less suitable than that of British Columbia, Alberta or Saskatchewan.

Thus regional identity is not a given for all time, but rather is chosen, at least in part. After picking out our coordinates on the east-west axis, we can also sketch them out

on the south-north axis, even without setting forth as our goal the transfer of Lithuania to Lapland or Madagascar. Realistically, of course, the range of choices is narrower, and the alternatives are identified in the title of this article. Therefore, is Lithuania (can it be, or ought to be) a northern or central European country?

To answer this question we must return to the previously-discussed question of Lithuania's shift (return) to the West. The crux of the matter is that the choice between northern and central Europe as the basis of regional self-identification is directly related to how we set the trajectory of movement to the West. A Western orientation was immediately adopted as a strategic goal of the Lithuanian people and the state, and was even enshrined in the Constitution of the Republic of Lithuania in a somewhat peculiar formulation as "non-accession to post-Soviet Eastern unions." More significant problems, however, arose in connection with the choice of trajectory.

The metaphor of two roads leading to Europe - one through Poland, the other through Scandinavia - was used more than once following the restoration of independence to illustrate the dilemma of choosing the appropriate foreign policy course. Poor relations with Poland during 1990-1993 ruled out the first alternative, the shorter road. A number of circumstances determined the status of Lithuanian-Polish relations. First of all, during the interwar period, relations were very tense on account of the Vilnius dispute. After regaining its independence a second time in 1990, Lithuania seemed to return psychologically to that era (even re-establishing briefly the validity of the 1938 Constitution). Although the political situation in 1990 was completely different and the *de facto* boundary between the two states was firmly established, old resentments surfaced on both sides. Some political forces in Poland could not accept that Vilnius belonged to Lithuania, thereby increasing Lithuanian distrust of Poland, which was so characteristic of the interwar period. Even official Poland viewed the re-establishment of independence in 1990-1991 with some reserve, at a time when many countries were expressing their fervent good will, which we may add, cost them nothing. Lithuanian independence following the Act of March 11 was viewed with considerable hostility by some Lithuanian Poles. We may also refer to them as *Lithuanians of Polish descent*, as Pope John Paul II did when he visited Lithuania, thereby provoking a great deal of dissatisfaction on the part of both Polish and Lithuanian radical nationalists. In part because many Lithuanian Poles spoke Russian as their native tongue and also because many did not have an especially favorable regard of Lithuanians, Lithuanian Poles viewed Lithuania as a more alien state than the Soviet Union. They perceived that the Republic of Lithuania was *forced upon them*. Neither did they wish to study the Lithuanian language, which most of them had not learned. In these circumstances, Gorbachev's and Moscow's skillfully cultivated anti-Lithuanian campaign in the Vilnius region could be developed without great difficulty. The Soviet Union considered this region and the Polish minority in Lithuania as a political card to be played against Lithuania in attempting to prevent its final departure from the alleged "Great Fatherland." This campaign was directed by the CPSU Central Committee and the CPSU regional heads in the Vilnius and Salcininkai districts. Overnight these local leaders managed to transform themselves from rabid internationalists to fervent Polish nationalists. Their straightforward goal was the creation of a politically autonomous Vilnius region, which the USSR could utilize against Lithuania much like Moscow utilized the Trans-Dniestr republic

against Moldova. Some anti-Communist political forces in Poland supported this Communist activity. Many in post-Communist Poland readily believed the Polish Communists of the Vilnius region when they complained about the evil Lithuanians' persecution of Poles in Lithuania. One needed merely to cast a glance at Moscow, however, to comprehend who was dictating these complaints. A wave of anti-Lithuanian resentment welled up in Poland in the fall of 1991, after the Supreme Council of the Republic of Lithuania dissolved the Vilnius and Salcininkai district councils (which represented the majority Polish inhabitants) for anti-Constitutional activity. In a letter written to Vytautas Landsbergis in December of 1991, Polish President Lech Walesa described Lithuanian-Polish relations as "close to critical."

Nevertheless, both countries agreed that it was imperative to improve bilateral relations. The August 1991 putsch, which led to substantially diminished support for the Polish Communist leaders in Lithuania by Moscow, permitted both countries to begin a slow process of rapprochement. On January 13, 1992, in Vilnius, Lithuanian Foreign Minister Algirdas Saudargas and Polish Foreign Minister Krzysztof Skubiszewski signed a general Lithuanian-Polish Declaration, which became the foundation for the subsequent bilateral political agreement. Although weakened, especially after new elections to the above-mentioned councils, the Lithuanian Poles' old and new political leaders' complaints regarding violations of Polish rights in Lithuania continued, however, to burden Lithuanian-Polish relations. Negotiations on the signing of an inter-state agreement were also complicated by Lithuania's unrealistic attempts to include in the agreement a condemnation of General Zeligowski's 1920 march on Vilnius, the occupation of Lithuania's capital and the later incorporation of the entire Vilnius region into Poland as illegal acts. Thus relations between the two states were not good either during 1992 or 1993.

For this reason, the road leading through Poland seemed closed. Given the Scandinavian countries' much more favorable attitude regarding Lithuania and the apparently self-evident Lithuanian view of the Baltic states as fraternal countries, it seemed clear that the Scandinavian road to Brussels would have priority. To be sure, this road would take a major detour through Latvia, Estonia, Finland, Sweden and Denmark. It was namely the choice of this road which determined the attempts at strengthening Lithuania's identity as a northern European country.

The northern European countries supported Lithuania's goal of independence from the very beginning of Lithuania's conflict with the Soviet Union. As early as the spring of 1991, Iceland became the first state in the world to recognize the re-establishment of Lithuanian independence. Denmark and Norway actively aided Lithuania. It is true that Sweden at first was somewhat more passive, but it later tried to compensate for its initial lethargy in various ways, including by becoming the first foreign state to open an embassy in Vilnius. Although the major Western states supported Lithuania in 1990-1991, they, and especially the US, were concerned with preserving the strategic balance of power and feared an uncontrollable collapse of the Soviet Union. Their freedom of maneuver in the international arena was thus constrained. Germany in particular felt constrained (and still does today), since it felt gratitude towards Russia (somewhat exaggerated, one might say) for German unity and avoided irritating Moscow at all costs. The Nordic countries were much freer because they did not feel such a great responsibility for the global balance of power. They perceived

their real interests on the Eastern shore of the Baltic Sea much more clearly than during the pre-war years and began expending efforts in support of Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia regarding their political, economic and cultural development as well as their integration into Europe.

Obviously, choosing the road to Europe through Scandinavia required closer cooperation among the three Baltic peoples. Baltic cooperation was strengthened by the establishment of links between Sajūdis and the popular fronts of Latvia and Estonia during the Rebirth period. The re-establishment of Baltic independence prompted the establishment, or re-establishment, of common institutions (some of them were created in the interwar period but were later liquidated by the Soviet Union) and the signing of quite a few cooperation agreements. A number of factors hindered interwar cooperation among the Baltic nations, despite the similarity of their fate (they all freed themselves from Russian "protection" in 1918). The most important evidently were not connected to differences in levels of cultural and economic development, or to religious heterogeneity, but rather were related to Lithuania's conflict with Poland over Vilnius, in which Latvia and Estonia did not wish to involve themselves. Latvia and Estonia felt that good relations with Poland were of greater importance than good relations with the much smaller and less influential Lithuania. Close links with Lithuania would have harmed relations with Poland. That is why it was difficult to even think of serious integration among the Baltic states at the time. Given the above, the establishment of the Baltic Entente in 1934, one with even very limited objectives, should be seen as a major diplomatic victory (especially for Lithuania). Nevertheless, the perception of a common Baltic identity remained quite dim in all three countries even after the creation of the Baltic Entente.

In 1988, the situation began to change. The three Baltic nations renewed their struggle to free themselves of the Soviet Union's "protection." The circumstance that this was being undertaken a second time in the 20th century strengthened the feeling of Baltic identity. Only Lithuania re-established its state in 1918, for the Latvians and Estonians had not previously established states of their own. The commonality of the historical fate of all three nations was much more apparent at the end of the XXth century than in 1918. Now all three nations were striving to restore independence. Working together in re-establishing and protecting independence became a key condition for achieving national goals. Significant milestones marking this cooperation before 1990, were the struggle for Baltic economic autonomy in the USSR Congress of People's Deputies, the abrogation of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, the introduction of the supremacy of republic legislation over Soviet laws and the change of the status of national languages. "The Baltic Way" not only demonstrated to the whole world the determination of the three nations to be free, but also served as an obvious expression of Baltic solidarity. Baltic identity began rapidly strengthening because the most important political goals of the three states coincided after the re-establishment of independence in 1990. These included: the elimination of the remains of Moscow's control, international recognition, the withdrawal of the Russian army and the creation of market economies and political democracy. Many Lithuanians began to conceive of Baltic identity as self-evident, and some Lithuanian political leaders regarded Baltic integration as an essential precondition for integration into the European Union.

The development of cooperation among the three Baltic states was accompanied by the expansion of cooperation between all of them and the Nordic countries, which slowly became ever more institutionalized in accordance with the 5+3 formula (5 northern European plus 3 Baltic countries). The Nordic countries' good will vis-a-vis the Baltic countries was clearly visible, although it was not entirely altruistic. Contacts of the most varied kinds and at different levels expanded rapidly. Lithuanians began seeing themselves as a part of the Baltic-Scandinavian (Balto-Scandian) region. The broader Nordic identity began to complement Lithuania's Baltic identity.

This was a completely new phenomenon in the history of Lithuania and the Lithuanian mentality. Lithuania had never before considered itself a Nordic country. It took a step towards the north in the XVIth century when it acquired territory corresponding to present-day Latvia and southern Estonia following the Livonian War. Nevertheless, Lithuania apparently was not too committed to keeping these lands, for it did not especially regret their subsequent loss. Instead, the Grand Duchy of Lithuania was more interested in pursuing expansion towards the east and south: the north was only a brief episode.

Lithuania's unfolding Nordic identity, which first emerged in 1990, was based essentially on a political foundation. In particular, religion distinguished Lithuania from northern Europe. And as history clearly shows, purely political links between different nations usually are not very durable. No doubt the three Baltic nations' common fate in the XXth century, their incorporation within the Russian Empire during the XIX century and the beginning of the XXth and a certain level of Russian cultural influence brought the three nations closer together than at any other time before. Undoubtedly they were more similar to each other in 1990, following 50 years of Sovietization, than they were in 1918. This similarity eased their collaboration.

Soon, however, problems complicating the three Baltic countries' relations started to proliferate. Although the Vilnius problem was no longer a burden, other disagreements became apparent. Their similar economic specialization made them competitors in international markets. The Estonians and Latvians feared that Lithuania, as the largest of the three, might start dominating the Baltic alliance. Each country was apprehensive - and not without reason - that the others might pursue their interests at the expense of the "Baltic Sisters." Lithuania was criticized for its "separate" negotiations with Russia regarding Russian troop withdrawal from Lithuania and for giving Latvia and Estonia insufficient support when Russia exerted pressure on them. The Estonians use every opportunity to trumpet their superiority in the Eastern Baltic and their success in carrying out economic and political reforms, while pointing to the inability of Latvia, and especially Lithuania, to keep up. The Latvians squabbled with the Estonians and Lithuanians in attempting to expand their economic zone in the Baltic Sea at the expense of their neighbors.

Friction between the Baltic states, the declarative nature of the activities of their common institutions, or simply their inactivity, their inability to put into practice many signed tripartite agreements considerably cooled the earlier enthusiasm about their integration. Efforts to link the three Baltic countries in the equivalent of the

Benelux Union (named Eslalija, for example) appeared increasingly unrealistic. It gradually dawned on everybody that Baltic integration was not a precondition for integration into the EU (this has become even more obvious after Estonia was invited to begin negotiations with the EU).

Given the above, Lithuania's foreign policy orientation began to shift during 1995-1996. The northern road to Europe, leading through Latvia, Estonia, Finland, Sweden (perhaps Norway) and Denmark appeared long and rutted. It was evident that certain stretches of the road would be difficult to master. The Lithuanians turned 180 degrees and saw that the second road which at first appeared closed was essentially open. Moreover, it is incomparably shorter. We are obviously talking about the road through Poland.

After four years of tension, the *Treaty on Friendly Relations and Good Neighborly Cooperation between the Republic of Lithuania and the Republic of Poland* was finally signed in 1994, and ratified the same year. The psychological shock which many Lithuanian Poles (or Lithuanians of Polish descent) experienced following the restoration of Lithuanian independence passed, or at least wore off substantially. They began to recognize the Lithuanian state, obtained Lithuanian citizenship and learned some Lithuanian. Some of them now genuinely regard themselves as Lithuanians of Polish descent, as the Pope had requested. The problem of Lithuanian Poles no longer embitters Lithuanian-Polish relations. Poland never officially disputed Soviet sovereignty over Vilnius and the Vilnius region in the post-war era. After Lithuania and Poland re-established diplomatic relations, Poland *de facto* recognized this region as belonging to Lithuania. The 1994 treaty dotted the final i's. With this, Lithuania achieved one of its most important diplomatic goals of the XXth century, which absorbed more of Lithuania's attention in the pre-war period than the preservation of sovereignty. Some in Lithuania are inclined to believe that the "Republic of the Two Nations," i.e. the common Lithuanian-Polish state which arose after the 1569 signing of the Union of Lublin, formally ceased to exist only after the 1994 treaty entered into force. This treaty truly has historical significance for Lithuania. It is not surprising that Lithuanian-Polish relations started to improve dramatically after the signing of this document. The political changes in Poland over the past few years resulted in the loss of power of certain political figures who were not especially well-disposed towards Lithuania. This outcome had a particularly favorable impact on the later development of both countries' relations. Four years ago, Lithuania already clearly perceived that Poland was a very serious candidate for membership of both the European Union and NATO (subsequent events confirmed this). Thus good and, even better, *exceptionally good* relations, are of vital significance to Lithuania as it pursues strategic foreign policy goals. And, what is more, it appeared to some influential political leaders that Lithuania's attachment to the Baltic geopolitical region (i.e., of Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia) is more of a hindrance than an advantage in pursuing an independent foreign policy: Lithuania in seeking NATO membership could gain more by accenting its individuality (and its ties to Poland) rather than its Baltic nature. In this way, Lithuanian foreign policy adopted an informal and unofficial position concerning the necessity of dismantling the Baltic geopolitical region (encompassing Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia). This position supplanted the dominant view of the importance of Baltic integration. In a formal sense, of course, this does not contradict the goal of strengthening cooperation among the three countries. But

separating cooperation from regional integration, which is an effective means of strengthening a geopolitical region, and moving instead to dismantle it, obviously reduces the level of tripartite and bilateral cooperation.

At an official level the inclination to dismantle the Baltic geopolitical region is reflected in the Lithuanian proposal to include at least one Baltic state (presumably Lithuania) in the first phase of NATO enlargement. Strangely enough, Lithuanian officialdom was displeased when the European Union began assisting in the dismantling of the Baltic geopolitical region by inviting Estonia to begin accession negotiations, but not Latvia and Lithuania. Lithuania's predictably unsuccessful efforts to sign bilateral US-Baltic Charters instead of a quadrilateral Charter of the US and the three Baltic states were a clear manifestation of the position in favor of leaving this geopolitical region. Adhering to this stance, Lithuania (and admittedly the other Baltic states) are not undertaking any decisive steps toward strengthening the Baltic Council of Ministers. On the other hand, there are clear signs that Baltic cooperation is developing and that some integration processes are continuing, especially in the military field. One need only mention three acronyms - BALTBAT, BALTRON and BALTNET - by way of illustration.

At this point it would seem natural to pose three questions: 1) Does the Baltic geopolitical region exist at all, and if so, is Lithuania capable of dismantling it? 2) How will Lithuania benefit from its dismantling? 3) What are the negative consequences for Lithuania of leaving the Baltic geopolitical region?

We will try to provide concise answers. First of all, the Baltic countries do not meet all of the political science criteria of a geopolitical region. Viewed historically (we shall limit ourselves to the XXth century), the three Baltic countries are merely a part of the interwar Eastern Baltic region, whose status was also doubtful. This region was composed of Finland, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania; Poland was sometimes included in this grouping as well. Aside from geographical considerations, the Eastern Baltic region was also united by interwar geopolitics: it was the zone where the interests of the Soviet Union and Germany (and to a lesser extent those of the other major powers) intersected.

The present region of the three Baltic countries, like the former Eastern Baltic region, does not have long-term prospects. It should become a part of a broader region in an integrated Europe (let us leave aside the question of *which* region for the end of the article). But if we narrow the focus of the analysis to several years, we must state that the region, or subregion, of the three Baltic countries is a fact of international political life at the end of the XXth century. The region exists not so much as a consequence of the efforts of the Baltic states, but rather because it represents a point (or unit) of intersection of the interests and policies of the major world powers. In this respect, the changes in the geopolitical status of the region over the past few years have been truly remarkable. Formerly a Russian sphere of influence, it has become an arena in which the interests and policies of very important and varied actors in international politics (first of all, the US, NATO, Russia and, to an extent, Germany) intersect. The Baltic countries succeeded in attracting the attention of the West and changing to a certain extent its previously sceptical view of the importance of the Baltic countries. Assuming that this is a significant foreign policy achievement of the

Baltic countries, one must ask if the attempts to dismantle the geopolitical region may not be counterproductive. Can we assume that those in the West who "worry" about the Baltic countries will care only about Lithuania? The geopolitical situation of the Baltic countries is much more favorable than it was in the interwar period, not least because they have been far more united in the international arena in recent years than during the 1918-1940 period.

If the Baltic geopolitical region is not only (perhaps not so much) a product of the Baltic countries' conscious policy, but rather a construct of the major actors on the international scene, then it is doubtful whether Lithuania will succeed in dismantling it, even with Estonian assistance. (Estonia's orientation toward Finland somewhat resembles Lithuania's present orientation toward Poland, although the Estonians envy the warmth of the Lithuanian-Polish relationship and the accompanying institutionalized links.) Perhaps it would be especially difficult to change the US position. The US, with its worldwide interests, would find it hard to pursue separate policies vis-a-vis small and proximate countries, without regard to whether they are Baltic or Benelux states.

Let us, however, assume for the sake of argument that Lithuania succeeds in taking apart the Baltic geopolitical region and convincing Western countries that they should regard the Baltic countries individually. What would be the consequences of such a change? Certainly they would not all be favorable. The greatest potential achievement might be the resulting opportunity to join NATO without regard to Latvian and Estonian prospects. The value of dismantling the geopolitical region might also be great if we accept as true the supposition that NATO will not agree to Estonian membership because it does not wish to create a military-strategic situation which would threaten the security of Russia's second-largest city and former capital. As for Latvia, membership in NATO is complicated by the significant political, and especially economic influence, of its large, Russian minority and, indirectly of Russia. Given that Lithuania's relations with NATO are of longer duration and more intensive than those of Latvia and Estonia, that the influence of Russians and of Russia is weaker, and also that the Kaliningrad region is not as important to Russia as St. Petersburg, then one can assume that Lithuania's acceptance into NATO is more likely than that of Latvia and Estonia.

This assumption, which has apparently been an important factor in Lithuania's recent foreign policy, may be questionable. Firstly, the envelopment of the Kaliningrad exclave by the territory of NATO countries (the result of Polish and Lithuanian NATO membership) can hardly be a much more acceptable outcome to Russia than NATO's proximity to St. Petersburg. (Should Estonia become a member of NATO, its border would be separated from St. Petersburg by a distance of about 100 kilometers, and Estonia along with NATO could pledge to refrain from stationing weaponry representing a direct threat to St. Petersburg). Secondly, accepting Lithuania alone among the Baltic states would not have the military-strategic significance for NATO which would result from accepting all three Baltic states. The Baltic countries' prospects for NATO membership evidently would improve only in the event that NATO would evolve even more distinctly along a political rather than a military course following the entry of Poland, the Czech Republic and Hungary. Improved relations between Russia and the West would also be an important precondition.

One may suppose that the dismantling of the Baltic geopolitical region would be advantageous in another respect, namely, by allowing closer cooperation with Poland. One should also note that Lithuanian-Polish rapprochement would enhance Lithuania's prospects for NATO membership. The problem of Lithuanian-Polish relations merits separate treatment. Yet it is clear even without delving into the matter that Lithuania's inclusion in the Baltic geopolitical region did not prevent Poland from identifying Lithuania as a strategic partner (incidentally, this term, which Polish President Aleksander Kwasniewski repeated in February of 1998 in Vilnius, illustrates the enormous changes which have occurred since the end of 1991, when President Walesa termed bilateral relations as close to critical). Thus it is not at all evident that Lithuania's policy of rapprochement with Poland requires it to loudly proclaim that Lithuania is not a Baltic and Nordic country, but rather a Central European state in the narrow sense of the word.

If Lithuania were to succeed in convincing the world that the Baltic countries should be treated individually and not as a geopolitical unit, it would lose some advantages. The 5+3 formula linking Nordic and Baltic countries could be changed to a 5+2 formula, which would exclude Lithuania. Responding to the objection that this is not likely, one could note that this unlikelihood bears witness to the indestructibility of the Baltic geopolitical region.

Should Lithuania "drop out" of the Baltic geopolitical region and fail to achieve NATO membership, despite all its efforts, then its security could be adversely affected by the possible loss of "soft" Western security guarantees which currently derive from Lithuania's inclusion in the relatively important Eastern Baltic region. Moreover, Latvia would become increasingly isolated if Lithuania were to pursue ever closer ties to Poland while Estonia oriented itself more and more towards Finland. Russia might take advantage of Latvia's isolation and strengthen its influence, which would worsen Lithuania's position (the Russian-speaking pensioners' demonstration in Riga in March of 1998 and, most significantly, the reaction to it within Russia are not particularly promising).

But let us return to Lithuania's relations with Poland. Rapprochement with Poland, termed a strategic partnership, is perhaps the most notable shift in Lithuanian foreign policy following the rejection of neutrality, which was the *declared* policy during the first few years after the restoration of independence (it was impossible to officially seek NATO membership because Lithuania had not been recognized internationally and the Russian army was stationed on its territory). Although Lithuania's relations with Latvia and Estonia were termed a strategic partnership back in the Sajudis period, and there is nothing to prevent a country from having several strategic partners, the idea of partnership with Poland was closely associated with the concept of abandoning the Baltic geopolitical region. Poland, and a friendly Poland in particular, is considerably more important to Lithuania than Latvia and Estonia taken together. Especially significant is Poland's demographic, economic and military potential as well as its prospective influence within NATO, the EU or CEFTA, taking into consideration Lithuania's interest in joining these institutions. Very close political and military relations with Poland are of significance in looking for a counterweight to Russian pressure. More intensive economic cooperation between Lithuania and

Poland might also encourage greater foreign investment into Lithuania. Poland's special relations with Germany and France (the so-called Weimar Triangle) show the importance which the West attaches to Warsaw.

Thus partnership with Poland opens up new and promising prospects. Bearing in mind the long-term history of bilateral relations, however, one is willy-nilly confronted with the following question: what motivates Poland in emphasizing the importance of its partnership with Lithuania? As history shows - and this applies not only to the history of Polish and Lithuanian relations - the love of one state for its neighbor, in particular a much smaller neighbor, is quite often motivated by rather egoistic impulses. Good or even very good relations with Lithuania are obviously useful to Poland in seeking the same goals which Lithuania is pursuing, namely, integration into NATO and the EU, since good neighborly relations are a precondition for integration. However, as Poland draws nearer to Lithuania it appears that Warsaw is also pursuing unilateral interests which are not directly connected with membership in NATO and the EU.

Poland is clearly interested in strengthening its influence in the Central and East European region and in attaining unquestioned leadership here. Having long been directly dependent on the Soviet Union, Poland now wishes to influence or even control events in the region. At present the region in which Poland's influence (or at least attempted influence) is most apparent includes Ukraine, Moldova, Romania, Hungary, the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Lithuania. Of course Poland would like to draw Belarus into this region, but Russia's strong influence is an obstacle. Poland is also interested in Latvia, Estonia and Bulgaria.

Not all of the countries of this region view Poland's desire to be dominant here in the same light. Hungary and the Czech Republic view this prospect with some suspicion and without enthusiasm. By contrast, the current president of Romania made Warsaw the destination of his first visit abroad. The strengthening of Polish influence in Slovakia is checked by Russia although not to the same extent as in Belarus. In Ukraine the prospects for expansion of Polish influence are quite good (both countries recently forgave each other the damage each inflicted on the other during the war and post-war years). In the future, however, as Ukraine strengthens economically and politically, bilateral relations will develop only on the basis of a dialogue among equal partners. Of all Poland's neighbors, Lithuania seems to be the country where Warsaw could most easily expand its influence. That is why Poland is proceeding to do this, and quite successfully. The present is an especially favorable time in which Poland can develop an independent foreign policy, given that Germany still limits the use of its political power and has economic problems arising from the unification of eastern and western Germany. Some Western countries apparently are quite well-disposed towards the rise of Polish influence in the region, where they do not wish to see Germany or Russia exercising too much direct influence.

The intensification of Lithuania's relations with Poland generally improves the international standing of Vilnius, although this is sometimes done at the expense of Lithuania's ties to Latvia, Estonia and, at the same time, to the detriment of relations with the Scandinavian countries. Lithuania might thereby face a certain danger of becoming too dependent on Poland, as it did a long time ago. Perhaps this danger is

not so great. But it is worth considering when discussing Lithuania's foreign policy orientation and regional self-identification. Moreover, Lithuania could end up in an uncomfortable position if Poland were to someday begin attaching less importance to the bilateral relationship. However, fears of a cooling in relations triggered by the 1997 Polish Sejm elections and the Lithuanian Presidential election of 1998 apparently proved groundless.

Lithuania's relations with Poland were formerly complicated by a shared past. Now, however, it is becoming an excellent basis for partnership. The shared past ensured the presence of cultural, and in part, psychological intimacy. Having received Christianity from Poland, Lithuania is very close to its neighbor in a religious respect at present. The Pope's affection towards Lithuania, which is based on known family ties, and the common worship of the Madonna of the Dawn's Gate are clear manifestations of this intimacy, as is a certain conservatism shared by the Church hierarchies of both countries. In the past, Lithuania was threatened by total Polonization of its language and culture. But the Lublin Union also had other consequences. Polish culture made a considerable impact on Lithuanian culture. Our cultural heritage coincides in part with that of Poland's. St. Anne's Church and the nearby standing sculpture of Adomas Mickevicius (or Adam Mickiewicz) as well as the old buildings of the University of Vilnius standing close by are spiritual treasures for both the Lithuanians and the Poles. The Old Quarter of Vilnius does not differ that much in its spirit from the Old Quarter of Krakow. In visiting one or the other, we are still in Central Europe.

There is no doubt that in a cultural sense Lithuania is closer to Central Europe than to Northern Europe. But this statement does not mean that we must respond to the question posed in the title of this article by asserting that Lithuania is not a Nordic, but rather a Central European country. For the question concerns not only culture, but also politics, the past as well as the future. The circumstance that Lithuania was not invited to a recent summit of Central European leaders gives added impetus to the question of whether Lithuania really is a Central European country in a political respect.

We mentioned earlier the negative consequences of rejecting Lithuania's Baltic, hence also its Nordic, identity and limiting cooperation within this region. In recent years, Lithuania may have appeared somewhat indecisive in searching for its political identity. It appeared indecisive not only because other countries shifted their policies toward Lithuania. In our opinion, Lithuania also defined the region (or subregion) in which it sought this identity too narrowly.

The reader may assume that the author is intent on proving that Lithuanians are Europeans. Furthermore, the better Europeans we will be, the sooner will the European Union accept us as members and thereby confirm our true identity. No, we are not going to talk about this. We are interested not in a European, but rather a sub-European regional identity. And in answer to the question of whether Lithuania is a Northern or Central European country, we reply as follows: *Lithuania is a Baltic Sea region country.*

Obviously this statement must be explained. It appears to be a reply to a somewhat modified version of the question posed in the title. But the significance lies elsewhere. It apparently would be more important to briefly examine two *contrary* arguments before answering this question. The first would be the following: this reply is obviously mistaken because Lithuania was historically never a maritime state. And since it is not a maritime state, Lithuania cannot belong to or identify itself with a region which is linked together in one totality by a sea. The second *opposing* argument would be the following: the author is making an excessively obvious statement by maintaining that Lithuania is on the Baltic Sea, that all of it belongs to the Baltic Sea basin in a hydrographic sense and that politically Lithuania has been a member of the Council of Baltic Sea States since its establishment in 1992.

Let us begin with the historical argument. In truth, Lithuania lived through the greater part of its history without giving any thought to the sea. It is true that before 1923, when Lithuania assumed control over the Klaipeda region, it never had any coastline of any significant length, excepting the era of Vytautas the Great. And when it did have such a coastline, it was on the Black Sea and not the Baltic. The Lithuanian Baltic coast encompassed merely several kilometers near Palanga, which, moreover, it did not always control. For along this coast ran the only overland communications route linking two separate orders of the Teutonic knights. And besides, Samogitia did not always belong to Lithuania.

Seen from a modern vantage point, the complete disinterest of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania in seeking an outlet to the Baltic Sea and annexing Klaipeda even when it would not have been difficult to do so (for example, after the Battle of Zalgiris), was a basic and systematically repeated foreign policy mistake. By contrast, Russia considered gaining an outlet to the Baltic as its *most important* foreign policy goal for more than a century before Peter the Great finally succeeded in founding St. Petersburg. And this goal retains its importance to Moscow even in the present. But the vantage point of the past was influenced by two basic circumstances. Firstly, Lithuania expanded towards the Southeast because it met with virtually no resistance there. At the same time, the orders of the Teutonic Knights represented a far more serious military and political force than the Slavic principalities. Secondly, even when Grand Duke Vytautas defeated this force, he was still interested in preventing the Teutonic Order from becoming too weak to serve as a future ally against his ally of the moment, namely, Poland. Classical balance of power policy precluded total defeat of a strong opponent. That is probably why the 1411 Peace of Tornau provided for the cession of Samogitia, but not of Klaipeda from the Teutonic Knights.

Beginning in 1569, after Lithuania and Poland joined together to form a common state, there were attempts to attain maritime country status. However, the Lithuanian-Polish state's efforts to wrest at least some control of the Baltic Sea from Sweden in the XVIIth century ended unsuccessfully. The Baltic Sea thus remained a "Swedish Sea" for a long time. And at the end of the XVIIIth century, the common Lithuanian-Polish state itself ceased to exist.

After Lithuania "recovered" Klaipeda in 1923, it lacked sufficient resources to develop its fleet, although steps in that direction were taken. However, Klaipeda did see development in the Soviet era as the most important Soviet ice-free port in the

Baltic Sea. A significant part of the Soviet fishing fleet was based here. When Lithuania took possession of it in 1990, it wound up with a truly impressive collection of fishing vessels.

Practically nothing remains of this fleet today (here we are not concerned with telling the story of its disappearance). Nevertheless, the *commercial fleet* and the port of Klaipeda are growing. An ever increasing number of ferry links connect it with the Baltic harbors of other states. And as time goes by, it becomes increasingly apparent that Lithuania *is* a part of the Baltic Sea region. The bulk of our trade is with the countries of this region. The greater part of foreign investment into Lithuania derives from the states of this region. Cooperation with the Baltic Sea countries is developing in all spheres: the Baltic Sea increasingly unites us with them.

One successful form of cooperation among the countries of the region is the *Council of Baltic Sea States* (CBSS). Frankly speaking, however, this organization is overshadowed in Vilnius by other organizations, namely, the European Union and NATO, whose membership Lithuania regards as strategic goals. Nevertheless, as Lithuania seeks integration into the most important European and Euro-Atlantic structures, it should not forget that regional cooperation is a very important dimension of these structures. Looking at the problem from this point of view, we must note that the Baltic Sea region is a natural part of Europe (perhaps more so than any other). The Baltic Sea is surrounded on all sides by European states. A shared civilization significantly eases cooperation among states, and in this respect, the Baltic Sea region surpasses the Mediterranean Sea region, for example. It is thus not surprising that cooperation among the countries bordering the Baltic Sea is even now closer than that of the Mediterranean Sea countries. More importantly, its prospects are much better. The potential for expanding cooperation is affirmed by historical experience. The Hansa League developed its activities here, and we will point out that the League's merchants were quite active in Lithuania.

Germany and Russia, two of Europe's most powerful and influential countries, belong to the Baltic Sea region. We should note that, for the first time in its history, Lithuania will preside over two of the largest states of Europe by virtue of its chairmanship of the Council of the Baltic Sea States, though only in a formal sense and relatively briefly. The circumstance that Lithuania's historical relations with these two nations were quite complicated adds an ironical dimension and flatters Lithuanian pride.

For now Germany is not participating in European political affairs as actively as it might, given the country's size and economic power. We clearly perceive this on the Eastern Baltic coast. Having proclaimed itself as the Baltic states advocate, Germany administers only very careful doses of its political support for them. We have already pointed to one reason for this state of affairs. The other reason is that Germany and France have good-naturedly agreed to a division of roles, whereby the former has become the economic leader of Europe, while the latter predominates politically. At present Germany is satisfied with this arrangement. Whether it will remain satisfied in the future is another matter. For the moment, Germany appears to be a sleeping giant who is reluctant even to stretch out energetically for fear of alarming those who once had experienced its power. But Germany's power (political and otherwise) is truly formidable, and Lithuania must take account of it. As Lithuania establishes its

priorities with the Central European states, it must not forget that Germany is the largest and most influential *Central* European state.

There is no need to prove the importance of Russia to Lithuania. Thus the CBSS, of which we are full-fledged members *now*, and not merely aspiring members, is especially useful to Lithuania. The other CBSS states represent a good counter-weight to Russia. Certainly it may appear to some that little Lithuania could not possibly feel comfortable in the company of such large states as Russia and Germany. But there exists an informal agreement within the CBSS which stipulates that, on a practical level of cooperation, these states shall be represented primarily by administrative units such as provinces, regions and cities which border on the Baltic Sea. That is why Lithuania does not feel so small within the CBSS. At the level of practical cooperation within the CBSS, Lithuania's largest partner is Poland, which is linked to Lithuania by friendship and strategic partnership. The provinces of *Schleswig-Hollstein and Mecklenburg-Vorpommern* are more interested in intensive cooperation with Lithuania than Germany as a whole.

With regard to Russia, the same should be said about St. Petersburg as well as the Leningrad and Kaliningrad regions, which represent Russia at a practical cooperation level in the CBSS. The CBSS provides Lithuania with an opportunity to engage in intensive multilateral cooperation with these important Russian regions, thereby promoting their successful economic and cultural development as well as more rapid integration into Europe. All of this is useful to both sides in a security context, too.

Almost all of the Baltic Sea region countries share the same or at least similar political goals. They are either members of the European Union or they actively seek accession. With regard to the latter, so far only Russia, Norway and Iceland distinguish themselves from the rest of the CBSS members. In addition, the European Union Commission takes part directly in CBSS activities. This makes the region singularly attractive to Lithuania. We have many good friends here who back our goals, which so far certainly are not universally supported. To be sure the region is still not very closely integrated as a geopolitical unit, which somewhat complicates Lithuania's identification with it. If we call ourselves Balts, we first of all have in mind ethnic-linguistic considerations. Secondly, we think of one of the three nations inhabiting the Eastern Baltic coast. And finally, we conceive of the community of nations of the entire Baltic Sea region. Nevertheless, the progress achieved towards integrating this region is manifest. A conference discussing theoretical aspects of the this problem was held in May of 1991 in Tallinn. Interestingly, it was entitled "A Region in the Making?" Today nobody would place a question mark after this title. The existence of the region is an indisputable fact. It has many aspects - including political, economic, ecological and cultural - because regional cooperation encompasses many forms and methods. Of course, the CBSS contributed substantially to regional integration.

The goals of the CBSS are more limited than those of the EU. In the words of the Declaration of the first Conference of Foreign Ministers of the Baltic Sea States, "The Ministers for Foreign Affairs of Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway, Poland, Russia, Sweden and the representative of the European Commission have assembled in Copenhagen on 5-6 March 1992 at the invitation of

the Danish and German Foreign Ministers in order to revitalize, strengthen and put into relief existing cooperation among the Baltic Sea States." The Declaration set forth these goals in seven chapters of the second part of the document whose titles reflect their essence: (1) Assistance to new democratic institutions; (2) Economic and technological assistance and cooperation; (3) Humanitarian matters and health; (4) Protection of the environment and energy; (5) Cooperation in the field of culture, education, tourism and information; (6) Transport and communication.

These goals have not changed much since 1992. In 1992, the CBSS could not have pointed to cooperation in the security sphere as one of its goals. The member states of the CBSS, which were later joined by Iceland, had quite different notions of how to guarantee security. There is no unanimity of views now, but the differences have lessened. Sweden and Finland at the time were neutral countries in the classical meaning of the term. Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia did not declare NATO membership to be their foreign policy goals. And Russia viewed the North Atlantic Treaty Organization with even greater hostility than at present. Neither was political cooperation among the CBSS states stated as an explicit goal in the 1992 Declaration. Nevertheless, the regular meetings between political leaders and senior officials, which received their impetus from the Copenhagen Conference, represented increasingly close political cooperation. And another important aspect is worthy of mention. The participants of the 1992 Copenhagen Conference even then noted in their Declaration that cooperation in the above-mentioned six spheres: "will strengthen the cohesion among these countries, leading to greater political and economic stability as well as a *regional identity* (underlined by author)."

Thus an official document of 1992, which bears the signature of the Foreign Minister of Lithuania, already discussed regional identity of the countries belonging to the CBSS. There is no doubt that Baltic identity (conceived in a new and broader sense than that of the three Baltic states) is growing stronger. The CBSS contributes to its development not only directly as it goes about discharging its tasks, but indirectly as well as the CBSS performs its role of an umbrella organization. Regional identity, the feeling of belonging to the same totality, is perhaps reinforced to a greater extent by daily contacts among people, firms, institutions, local governments and non-governmental organizations than through meetings of senior officials and declarations. Such contacts are intensifying and thereby becoming more significant. Many are being institutionalized. The number of such institutions in the Baltic Sea region is increasing perhaps more rapidly than anywhere else in Europe, which illustrates the region's dynamism and prospects. The following are only a few of these institutions: the Union of Baltic Cities, the Conference of Baltic Sea Rectors, the Association of Baltic Sea Chambers of Commerce, Agenda 21 for the Baltic Sea and the Baltic Sea Commission. This list can be extended considerably. The CBSS serves as an umbrella organization for cooperation of a great variety of individuals, including parliamentarians and secondary school students. It is clear that individual contacts are especially effective in bringing people closer together. Schoolchildren from Vilnius who have an opportunity to live with the families of schoolchildren in Odense can begin to comprehend that Lithuanians and Danes are members of the same regional family of nations. Exchanging private visits and building up family contacts are an excellent way of fostering a feeling of togetherness and identity. At present, quite a few Lithuanians who regularly travel to Stockholm, Warsaw and

Copenhagen do so almost as though they are going to their second homes. This feeling has been reinforced by the notable progress that has been achieved in the field of transport and communications, particularly in linking the eastern and western parts of the Baltic Sea region.

On July 1, 1998, Lithuania will begin its chairmanship of the CBSS. It intends to place special emphasis on CBSS members' cooperation in strengthening civic security, especially the fight against organized crime and illegal immigration as well as civil defense. Of particular importance to Lithuania will be the creation of technical systems in the Baltic Sea which could monitor the movement of ships and aircraft as well as ecological conditions and be especially helpful in emergencies. The development of transport and telecommunications should also be promoted through the opportunities afforded by the CBSS. We believe that Lithuania could take advantage of its new possibilities within the CBSS to support the creation of the Baltic energy ring and to invigorate the flagging efforts of the countries in building the Via Baltica. Implementation of projects like the Baltic energy ring would doubtlessly contribute to the enhancement of "soft" security for Lithuania. In general, the CBSS is important to Lithuania also from a security standpoint, despite this institution's extremely peaceful orientation.

The CBSS may well be the most successful European regional organization. It helped to overcome the legacy of the Cold War and significantly enhanced regional security and confidence. The CBSS format is useful in solving problems which otherwise might be difficult to deal with in a bilateral framework. Further development of its activities would be aided by the establishment of a permanent secretariat, especially since the beginnings of one already exist *de facto* in Stockholm. The official establishment of a secretariat would not require great outlays. Lithuania could make use of its position as CBSS chairman to advance the solution of this question. Admittedly one CBSS country is not particularly fond of this secretariat, but it is perfectly obvious that it would strengthen the CBSS. All these who favor enhancing CBSS cooperation should understand that a permanent secretariat would represent practical support in intensifying CBSS activities. Doubtless a secretariat would increase the prestige and influence of the CBSS.

The CBSS is an organization, whose utility has still not been properly apprehended in Lithuania. Lithuania *is* a Baltic Sea region country. The advantages of the CBSS are manifest, both with regard to finding good friends and Lithuania's place in Europe. Independently of the readiness of Lithuanian political leaders to attribute particular importance to the CBSS, Lithuania is increasingly orienting itself toward the sea. It is rectifying historical errors by becoming a maritime state. This is demonstrated as well by the rapid development of Klaipeda, which has an excellent opportunity to overtake Kaunas at some point and become the second most important city in Lithuania. The Baltic Sea region practically encompasses all of the countries which are important to Lithuania, with the exception of the US, and frees Lithuania from making wrenching choices between Central and Northern Europe. The advantage of this region is that it embraces both the Baltic region in a narrow sense (i.e., Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia) as well as Poland. Maintaining good relations with the other countries of the Baltic Sea region certainly will not be an obstacle to developing relations with Poland. Lithuania's orientation toward the Baltic Sea region permits it to pursue a more

balanced foreign policy than an orientation toward one or another state in the region. As a CBSS member, we can set off for Brussels by taking two roads, a northern and southern, and thereby improving our chances of reaching it sooner. Having mentioned the US, we should note that even this country is endeavoring to join the CBSS, although so far without success. It is paradoxical that there are politicians in Lithuania who underestimate membership in the CBSS, while at the same time, the world's most powerful state is eager to join, even though it is separated by 4000 nautical miles from the nearest point in the Baltic Sea, the Kattegat narrows.

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